

Complete History of gaming



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A large, stylized graphic of the letters '80s' in a vibrant pink color. The numbers are composed of multiple concentric circles, creating a tunnel-like or ripple effect. The '8' and '0' are large, while the 's' is smaller and positioned to the right of the '0'.

- 04** 1980 Pac-Man
- 08** 1981 Donkey Kong
- 12** 1982 E.T.
- 16** 1983 Dragon's Lair
- 20** 1984 King's Quest
- 24** 1985 Super Mario Bros.
- 28** 1986 Bubble Bobble
- 32** 1987 Phantasy Star
- 36** 1988 Super Mario Bros. 3
- 40** 1989 Tetris

1UP
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HIGH SCORE
012500

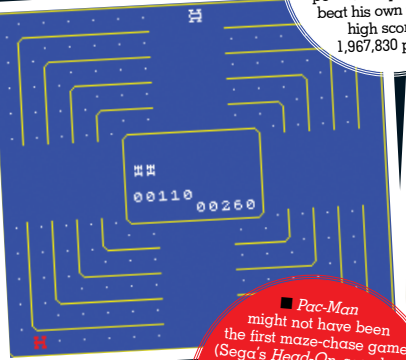
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BONUS
4900





■ Possible superhuman Tony Temple holds the current high score record for *Missile Command* with an impressive 4,472,570 points. Temple actually beat his own previous high score of 1,967,830 points.



■ *Pac-Man* might not have been the first maze-chase game (Sega's *Head-On*, seen here, predates it by a year), but it did come to popularise the genre. So famous was Namco's mascot that few developers have been able to put their own stamp on the genre without their game being labelled a *Pac-Man* clone.



THANKS TO *Space Invaders* fever, the games industry found itself in a strong position as it entered the Eighties. The popular VCS home conversion of Taito's seminal shooter is even credited as being the game that put Atari's VCS on the path to absolute success story, a big factor in helping the console to sell a million units in 1980 – practically double its previous year's sales. By the end of the year, the VCS was beginning to show signs of leaving a notable mark on the world, while the booming coin-op industry had also been a hive of activity.

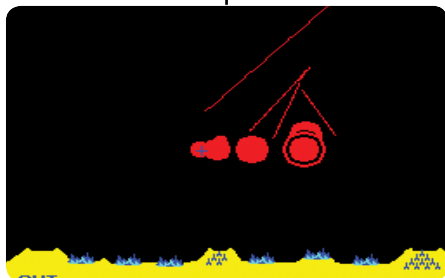
Indeed, the early Eighties brought about a golden age for videogames, a time of great innovation, prosperity, popularity and fast growth. As such, these pages are often reserved for looking at advances in videogame hardware, but a fair number of games released in 1980 proved themselves to be important titles that would inform game design in the coming years as well as change the way many people viewed videogames.

Undoubtedly, the most important title to be released throughout 1980 was *Pac-Man*. A game that birthed videogames' first cultural icon, the popularity of Namco's dot-munching hero came as a result of him starring in a game that was designed to appeal to two demographics that had previously been ignored by game developers: women and couples. Coming as a breath of fresh air in a market filled with titles that were either too abstract or male-focused to appeal to mainstream audiences, *Pac-Man*'s success was quick and

YEAR IN 19

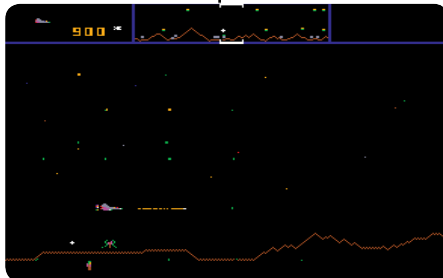
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MISSILE COMMAND



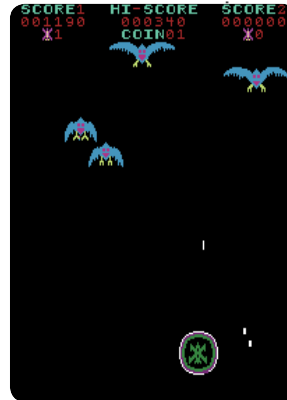
■ Inspired by a nightmare its author Dave Theurer had about the very real threat (at the time) of all-out nuclear war brought about by the Cold War tension between the Soviet Union and the US, *Missile Command* challenged players to save six cities from airborne salvos using quick reflexes and skilled manipulation of a trackball.

DEFENDER



■ A CHALLENGING game owing to its intricate controls and gameplay, *Defender* is the granddaddy of the side-scrolling shooter, and has the dual honour of also being one of the most successful ever arcade games too. Gameplay sees you destroying waves of alien ships while protecting astronauts from abduction.

PHOENIX



■ IN THE wake of *Space Invaders* mania many clones emerged, and the most successful included *Galaxian* in 1979 and Amstar Electronics' *Phoenix* in 1980. The latter is notable for taking the formula, adding shields and making the destruction of its mothership boss a separate challenge for players.

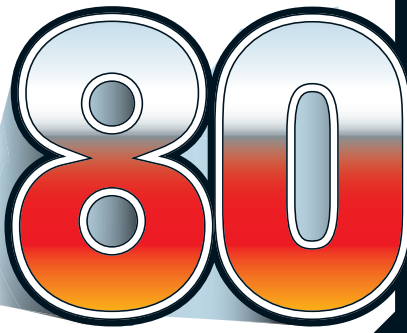
STORY OF GAMES

1981 1982 1983

unprecedented, and highlighted the rewards for releasing games that everybody could enjoy.

Equally, *Space Invaders*' immense popularity was still as strong as ever, and had exposed a huge audience that enjoyed science-fiction-themed games, which many developers still looked to target. And 1980 saw the release of two games that many still consider the most challenging in the genre: Williams' *Defender* and Atari's *Missile Command*.

REVIEW



Both titles became hugely popular as skilled players embraced the stiff challenge they posed, and this new wave of game that demanded players hone their skills and reflexes to see past a few seconds of gameplay helped to ignite a strong sense of competition. It was a new trend in gaming culture that was perhaps first identified by entrepreneur Walter Day, who set up the Twin Galaxies arcade in 1981 to officially record, referee and verify videogame high scores. Helping bring skilled

players to the attention of the public, record-holders soon started to be seen as minor celebrities by the media as awareness and interest in videogames escalated. At the close of 1980 two different kinds of gamers had begun to appear: those who enjoyed playing games for escapism and fun, and those who looked to master games by improving their coordination, reaction and dexterity. It gave rise to what we now call casual and hardcore gamers.

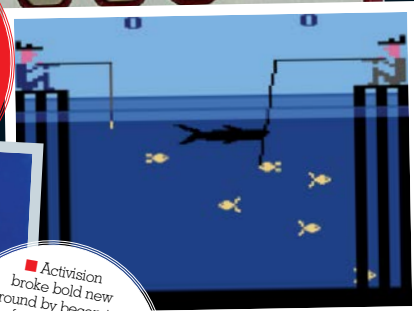
players to the attention of the public, record-holders soon started to be seen as minor celebrities by the media as awareness and interest in videogames escalated.



■ In 1980, Nintendo released its first foray into the world of portable gaming with the Game & Watch. Designed by Game Boy creator Gunpei Yokoi, a total of 60 G&W games were released. The durable LCD devices also mark the appearance of Nintendo's first videogame mascot: Mr. Game & Watch.



■ Activision broke bold new ground by becoming one of the first third-party games publishers when it began releasing games for the Atari VCS in 1980. The first two titles put out by the publisher were a fishing and skiing game.



RELEASES

RED BARON



■ Developed alongside *Battlezone*, but with its combat set in the sky rather than at ground level, *Red Baron* is less well-known than its counterpart but just as fun to play. Taking place during the first World War, you take to the skies in a biplane and earn points by destroying various air and ground targets.

BATTLEZONE



■ This striking vector shooter by Atari was famous for being one of the earliest games to feature a fully 3D playing field (an honour it shares with *Red Baron*). The game slots players inside a futuristic tank, and with the gameplay viewed from a first-person perspective asks them to battle with enemy tanks and flying saucers.

DEVELOPER of the YEAR

Richard Garriott

■ As well as space, fantasy also came to influence early videogame developers. And none more so than legendary game designer Richard Garriott, whose love for *Dungeons & Dragons*, the works of Tolkien and an interest in computers inspired him to write his first game: *Akalabeth: World Of Doom*. When the game became an unexpected success, Garriott promptly got to work on a follow-up. That sequel became an even bigger success and was the first in the popular and long-running *Ultima* games. Released in 1980, *Ultima I: The First Age Of Darkness* is recognised as the first true computer role-playing game, marking a turning point for the genre.

EXTENDED PLAY: 1980

PAC-MAN

EACH MONTH WE SELECT ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING OR IMPORTANT GAMES FROM OUR YEAR IN REVIEW. THIS MONTH, THE GAMES INDUSTRY IS DELIVERED A PIZZA, AND IT'S MISSING A SLICE...



SPACE MIGHT well have been the final frontier for Captain Kirk and his crew, but for videogames it was one of the first. A relationship that began in 1962 with *Spacewar!*, videogames early fascination with the black cosmos is, in hindsight, one that is perhaps to be expected. Both space and videogames are strongly associated with science and technology, and from a practical perspective space provided the perfect early playmate for our beloved pastime. Its blackness was easy to display on early technology limited to projecting monochromatic images; angular shapes, such as spaceships, were easy to draw, animate and distinguish; and

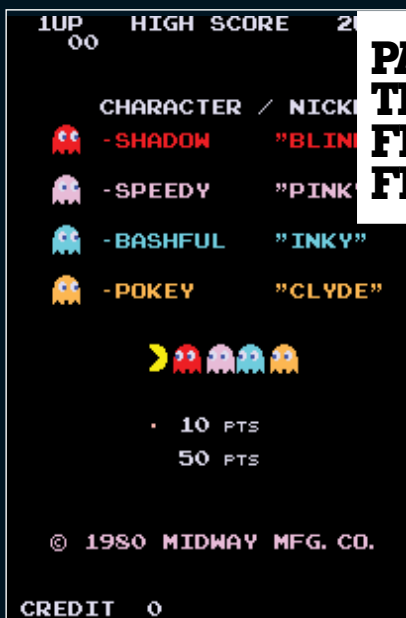


space is eerily quiet too, solving the issue of in-game music.

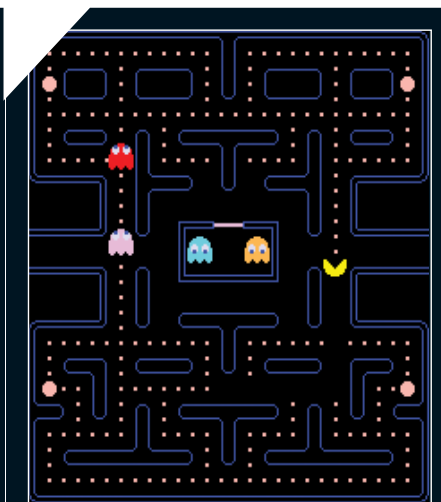
Videogames' inaugural relationship birthed many games with intergalactic themes, but none are more famous or successful than *Space Invaders*. This watershed game not only helped to firmly establish the shoot-'em-up genre, but also brought videogames to wider attention and publicity. By the end of the Seventies the stage was set to build on what *Space Invaders* had achieved and become an even bigger sensation. Thankfully, the world didn't wait very long. That game arrived in 1980, courtesy of Namco's Toru Iwatani. "In the late Seventies, videogame

arcades were just playgrounds for boys, and the only videogames on offer were brutal affairs involving the killing of aliens. My aim was to come up with a game that had an endearing charm, was easy to play, involved lots of light hearted fun, and that women and couples could enjoy." Iwatani revealed in an interview about the moment he decided it would be a good idea to try to test the status quo of gaming, changing it forever. With 'Eat' the key word behind the concept of his game, inspired by something he imagined women enjoyed doing, Iwatani came across an image of a pizza that had a slice missing from it and was delighted when an image of what would later become the character of Pac-Man appeared in his head.

Originally released in 1980 as *Puck-Man* in Japan, it was when Bally Midway secured the US publishing rights – and the title changed to *Pac-Man* (as it was feared that some cheeky vandals quite could easily alter the P to an F) – that Iwatani's creation really made its mark on the games industry. Proving many 'experts' wrong, who



PAC-MAN PROVED THAT STARS COULD FINALLY BE MADE FROM SPRITES



Pac-Man was the first game that attempted to breathe character into game sprites – even the supernatural enemies had their own unique personalities, their attributes, like pokey and shadow, determining the way in which they chase Pac-Man.



Proving Pac-Man's celebrity has stood the test of time, the May 2008 report by the Davie Brown Celebrity Index revealed that Pac-Man was recognised by 94 per cent of US consumers. Putting him in line with people like Conan the Barbarian and Steve Buscemi, we suspect.

STORY OF GAMES

1981 1982 1983 1984

doubted the game's appeal at the time, his creation sent the already booming arcade business into popularity overdrive as *Pac-Man* attracted a strong following from both men and women of all ages, many of whom had never even played a videogame before in their lives.

While maze games existed before it – the 1979 Sega coin-op *Head On* features similar gameplay to that of *Pac-Man*, in that it sees players driving a car over dots in a maze and having to avoid hitting enemy vehicles – it was *Pac-Man*'s perfect combination of appealing cutesy characters, endearing charm, the clever way it allowed players to satisfyingly turn the tables on their enemies, and its timing that made it such a huge phenomenon.

Opening up the floodgates for many more iconic characters to appear on the scene, *Pac-Man*'s popularity showed many developers what could happen if they came up with original creations and pushed them to the fore in their games, splashing their names and faces all over cabinet art and marquees. Going down in history

■ The name *Pac-Man* is said to have derived from the Japanese slang term 'Paku-Paku', which is apparently an onomatopoeia for the sound a mouth makes when opening and closing during eating... if you're a pig, clearly.



as the first legitimate videogame celebrity, later appearing on clothing to lunchboxes, and even receiving

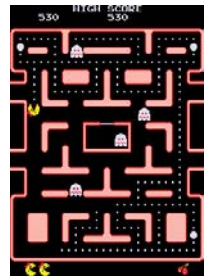
his own cartoon series on ABC-TV, *Pac-Man* proved that the popularity of videogames had become such that stars could finally be made from sprites.



THE SEQUELS

MS. PAC-MAN (1981)

■ The first *Pac-Man* sequel began life as a *Pac-Man* hack titled *Crazy Otto*, but later became a true *Pac-Man* sequel after Midway purchased the game and a deal was struck with Namco. It tweaks cursory aspects of the original, such as adding new mazes and slapping a bow onto the hero's head.



SUPER PAC-MAN (1982)

■ The first sequel from Namco altered the gameplay quite dramatically: rather than dots, *Pac-Man* had to gobble up keys that would open up sections of the maze housing pick-ups. All-new Super Pellets also made *Pac-Man* super-sized – allowing him to gobble up doors and move at increased speed.



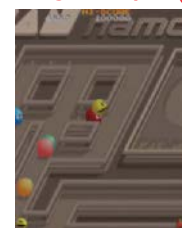
PAC-LAND (1984)

■ To perhaps prove the versatility of *Pac-Man*, Namco abandoned the maze chase gameplay in *Pac-Land*, plonking the character in a colourful side-scrolling platformer instead. The game predates many of the genre's exemplary titles – including *Super Mario Bros.*



PAC-MANIA (1987)

■ This revamp featured colourful isometric visuals and added a few new features such as themed mazes, new ghost enemies and allowing *Pac-Man* to keep his handy jump ability from *Pac-Land* – useful for last minute evasion of his ethereal tormentors.

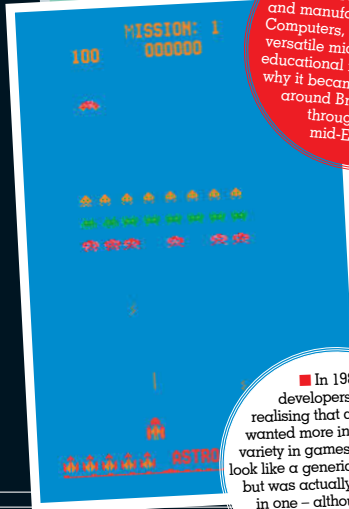


WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

■ TODAY IT'S hard to imagine just how popular the 'maze chase' subgenre was in the midst of *Pac-Man* fever. Many companies tried to capture *Pac-Man*'s success with similar games, but few measured up and the genre eventually faded away, kept alive only by sporadic *Pac-Man* updates. Forgetting the countless number of unofficial *Pac-Man* clones and hacks that

appeared, the most notable contenders for *Pac-Man*'s crown were perhaps *Pengo* by Sega and the NES game *Devil World*, which was co-designed by Shigeru Miyamoto. Though strictly not a 'maze chase' game, arguably the most successful variation of the theme is Hudson Soft's *Bomberman* series, which has spawned over 60 separate games.





■ 1981 also saw the release of the BBC Micro. Designed and manufactured by Acorn Computers, the 'beeb' was a versatile micro aimed at the educational market, which is why it became a firm fixture around British schools throughout the mid-Eighties.



■ In 1981 developers were realising that consumers wanted more in the way of variety in games. *Gorf* might look like a generic shoot-'em-up but was actually five games in one – although two of these were riffs on *Space Invaders* and *Galaga*.

■ SUCH WAS their prohibitive cost that before the Eighties computers had become the sole preserve of businesses, universities and dedicated computer hobbyists. But by 1981 manufacturers had started to reach the obvious conclusion that for computers to become more popular they would need to be more affordable. This year saw the release of three machines that proved instrumental in helping find new homes for computers.

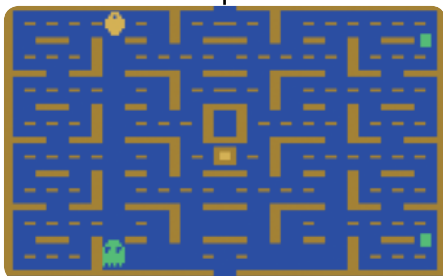
In March, Sinclair Research released the ZX81. The successor to its 1980 budget micro the ZX80 (the first computer to sell for under £100), the streamlined tech inside the ZX81, combined with the release of a number of optional add-on peripherals including a RAM expansion and printer, afforded it a significant jump in functionality over its predecessor. More crucially than that though, it was cheaper. With ready assembled models costing £69.95, and self-assembly kits priced at just £49.95, it provided the perfect introductory computer for many families. Selling more than 1.5 million units, it transformed the fortunes of Sinclair Research and put it firmly on the road to becoming Britain's leading computer manufacturer. But perhaps the machine's most important legacy was in helping popularise computing in Britain, and inspiring many curious enthusiasts to start experimenting with programming, in turn marking the rise of bedroom coders and homebrewed software which helped to feed and grow Britain's burgeoning games industry.

In the US (May) and UK (September), Commodore also released its first affordable, user-friendly home computer, the VIC-20. Costing

YEAR IN 19

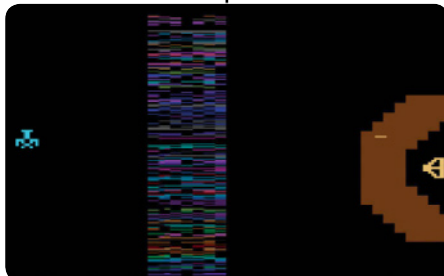
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PAC-MAN (2600)



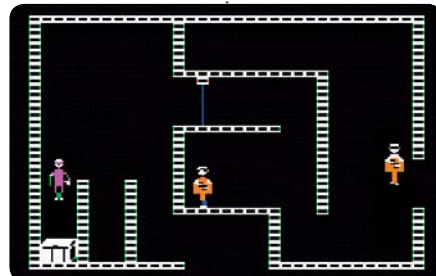
■ IN 1981 Pac-mania was in full swing, to the extent that an infamous VCS port of the was game released this year, widely thought to have been a hurried prototype pushed out the gates to meet the holiday season. It became one of the most successful Atari 2600 games of all time.

YARS' REVENGE



■ PROGRAMMED BY our very own Retro columnist Howard Scott Warshaw, *Yars' Revenge* told the tale of an intergalactic housefly sent on a perilous mission to destroy a giant alien weapon. With striking visuals, great sound effects, and multifaceted gameplay, it remains one of the most technically impressive games on the VCS.

CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN



■ Widely recognised as the first stealth action game, this seminal Apple II game tasked players with sneaking into a heavily guarded Nazi castle to retrieve sensitive documents. Legendary programmer John Romero would later famously repurpose the setting for id Software's genre-building FPS *Wolfenstein 3D*.

S T O R Y O F G A M E S

1982 1983 1984 1985

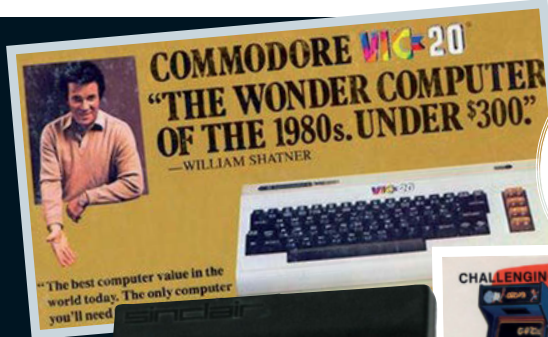
\$299.99 (£199.99), it was one of the first computers to be sold in US retailers and became a popular home computer in both territories.

Foreseeing the computer boom that was about to strike Britain, in 1981 BBC Education launched the Computer Literacy Project. A scheme aimed to teach children the basics of computers, focused around a ten-part television series, the innovative TV project led to the release of yet another iconic British microcomputer in this year.

Looking for a versatile computer with which to base its series around, the BBC approached a number of British-based computer manufacturers. At the time, Acorn Computers had been working on a successor to its first computer, the Atom. After getting a prototype of the machine – the Proton – to a state that could be demoed to the BBC, Acorn successfully clinched the deal and the computer was released that November as the BBC Microcomputer System.

Thanks to the television exposure, the BBC became hugely popular, especially in the education sector, but its initially advantageous tie with

education would ultimately prove to be its Achilles heel. The success of the ZX81 and VIC-20 led to Sinclair and Commodore releasing hugely popular successors in the ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64 in 1982. These machines, as we all know, went on to dominate computing in the Eighties thanks to strong support from Britain's software industry. Sadly, despite some popular games written for the BBC, such as *Frak!*, *Repton* and the groundbreaking space trading time-sap *Elite*, the computer failed to enjoy the same success after it established a status for being a learning tool, and was unable to shake the shackles of the classroom.



■ To help the VIC-20 to appeal to the common man, Commodore got a familiar face in William Shatner to appear in the computer's commercials. Commodore was certainly pulling out the big guns to make the machine a success. It worked too.



■ This year saw the release of the precursors to the ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64, the ZX81 and VIC-20 respectively. The computers mark Sinclair and Commodore's efforts to create affordable home computers for the masses.



■ You are here? If this confusing US flyer is anything to go by, it's little wonder *Radar Scope* only sold half the cabinets that Nintendo ordered. We're guessing this wasn't Miyamoto's handiwork.



■ Following *Pac-Man*'s success in Japan and the US, a flood of similar games saw release into arcades, among them *Lady Bug* and *Got-Ya*. Neither of which could be seen to push the *Pac-Man* formula in any meaningful new direction, which is why you've probably never heard of them.

RELEASES

FROGGER



■ THE PHENOMENAL arcade success of *Frogger* proved that a bit of quirkiness could make you a lot of money in arcades. This original game (avoid-

'em-up?) by Konami spawned (see what we did there?) a large number of sequels, merchandise and even its own cartoon series. Not bad for a game about marshalling frogs home.

WIZARD OF WOR



■ IN THE midst of *Pac-man*ia there were many wannabes, but *Wizard Of Wor* stands as one the most original spins on the maze genre to have emerged. It saw players clearing dungeon mazes of various monsters before facing-off against the game's titular sorcerer. Its most notable aspect was its unique co-op gameplay.

DEVELOPER —of the— YEAR Malcolm Evans

■ The humble beginnings of the cottage computer game industry in Britain can probably be traced back to the inquisitive Malcolm Evans.

After receiving a ZX81 as a birthday gift from his wife in 1981, Malcolm, an electronic engineer, set about testing the computer's limits. In doing this, he wrote the seminal *3D Monster Maze*, the first ever 3D game for a home computer (though it wasn't officially published until the following year). Playing out in a first-person perspective, it saw players escape a maze while trying to avoid a tyrannosaurus rex hunting them. Following its success, Malcolm continued to write games for the ZX series, such as the 1984 ZX Spectrum smash *Trashman*.

EXTENDED PLAY: 1981

DONKEY KONG

Each month we select one of the most interesting or important games from our year in review. This month, we look at the stubborn ape that came to Nintendo's rescue



IN 1981, NINTENDO found itself on the ropes after recently establishing a base in North America and investing in the purchase of 2,000 arcade cabinets of a game that failed to strike a chord with its consumers: the *Galaga*-style shooter *Radar Scope*.

With arcade operators left angry by the lack of earnings from the machine, Nintendo CEO Hiroshi Yamauchi turned to a young (and then unproven) Shigeru Miyamoto to design him a new game that could be retrofitted into the cabinets to turn the situation around, saving Nintendo's failing reputation.

Originally, Miyamoto's plan was to make a game based on the popular Popeye cartoon, but when Nintendo was unable to secure the rights to use Popeye, Olive Oyl and Bluto in his game, the legendary designer was forced to come up with three characters of his own.

Choosing not to stray too far from the personalities of his three original cartoon muses, he sketched himself a Popeye-type everyman hero in carpenter Jumpman, an Olive Oyl-style damsel and love interest in Lady, and a brutish, Bluto-like adversary in the stubborn titular ape Donkey Kong, and mimicking the explosive love triangle between the three characters in the cartoon fused a similar volatile relationship in his characters.

In addition to Popeye, Miyamoto drew inspiration from a number of other influences for *Donkey Kong*, among them the 1933 movie *King Kong*, the

fairy tale *Beauty And The Beast* and his academic background in industrial design, which undoubtedly informed the game's construction site setting.

As well as marking both the legitimate birth of the platform game and first game from Shigeru Miyamoto, *Donkey Kong* represents a number of other important innovations and

THE BIRTH OF THE PLATFORM GAME AND THE FIRST GAME FROM SHIGERU MIYAMOTO



With its mix of giant ape, construction-based levels and dungaree-wearing hero, *Donkey Kong* is a fairly odd mish-mash of influences. Yet its influence is so far-reaching that it's impossible to imagine the landscape of videogame history without it.

milestones for the videogame. It was the first game to feature animated cut-scene sequences to attach a story to its gameplay, marks the first videogame appearance of Mario – when Jumpman was renamed after Nintendo's US landlord Mario Segali for the game's US release – and was also the first game to feature distinct levels too: four different looping stages that all took the complete form of a construction site 100 meters high, with each 25 meter increment providing a new and very different challenge for players to tackle.

The first screen, the iconic 'Girder' stage, finds Jumpman trying to reach his girl by running across girders and climbing up ladders while avoiding the errant barrels rolled and thrown by Donkey Kong from above. From here (if you're playing the original Japanese version), the next screen takes you to the 'Cement Factory'. The easiest of the four stages, it requires assured timing and control as retracting ladders and sticky conveyor belts stifle Jumpman's plight.

The third stage, 'Elevator', was as a test of precise jumping and clever positioning, while the final screen, 'Rivets', was a clear measure of a player's patience as they had to delicately remove supports beneath Donkey Kong to cause him to topple to the ground and finally reunite Jumpman with his sweetheart.

These four looping stages combine to offer gamers a complete workout of their skills and dexterity. Indeed, *Donkey Kong* is widely regarded as one of the most challenging arcade games of all time, which is why the honour of being its master has been so passionately



■ Such was *Donkey Kong*'s success that it was converted to pretty much every console and computer of its time. The ports ranged from the surprisingly faithful to the shockingly awful. This is the Intellivision port; we'll give you one guess which category it falls into.

contested since its release – exposed in the gripping documentary *King Of Kong: A Fistful Of Quarters*.

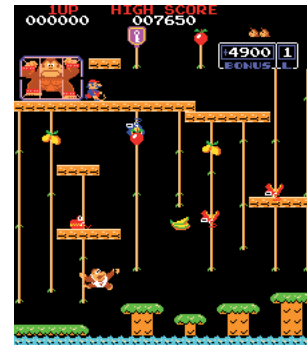
Games were never really quite the same again following *Donkey Kong*'s success. And, had he not arrived on the scene in 1981 to rescue Nintendo and shake up videogame conventions, it's no exaggeration to say the games industry would undoubtedly look a much different place today.

■ *Donkey Kong* was never released in the UK. Instead we received a pretty close licensed clone of the game courtesy of coin-op publisher Falcon, which had secured the European licensing rights. Such was the high demand of *Donkey Kong* in the US though, that many *Crazy Kong* cabinets still found their way there.



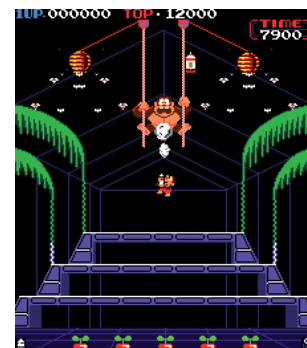
THE SEQUELS

DONKEY KONG JR.



■ For the sequel all the roles were reversed. Mario played the villain, DK the captor and the hero was Donkey Kong's son, Junior. The objective

remains pretty much the same as before – reach the top – but the action now takes place across jungle-themed stages.



DONKEY KONG 3

■ A strange mixture of top-down shooter and platformer, *Donkey Kong 3* plonked players in the coveralls of Stanley the Bugman. Armed with a

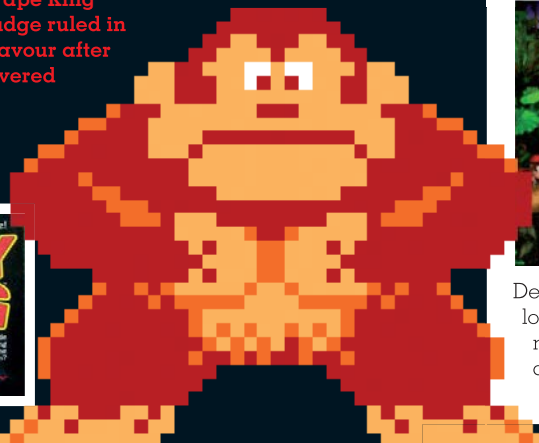
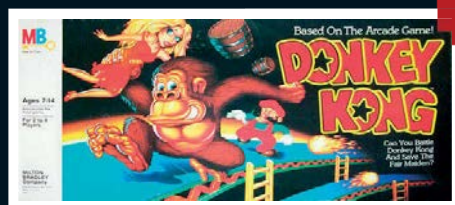
can of bug spray, Stanley had to spray away Donkey Kong while protecting his prized flowers from bees.

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

■ Within a month, *Donkey Kong*'s success was guaranteed as demand for the machine skyrocketed. Within a year Nintendo had sold around 60,000 units, earning the company a staggering \$180 million, and in no time at all Donkey Kong's face had appeared on everything from cereal boxes to board games and even broadcast television.

But his success also attracted unwanted attention, namely from Universal Studios, which took Nintendo to court over the similarity of Donkey Kong to its stop-motion ape King Kong. The judge ruled in Nintendo's favour after it was discovered that in an earlier case Universal had been

successful in proving the character was within the public domain, and thus completely acceptable for Nintendo to use his likeness in its game.



DONKEY KONG COUNTRY



■ After a long hiatus Donkey Kong remerged in the most impressive-looking platform game of the 16-bit era.

Developed by Rare, it starred a new, leaner-looking Donkey Kong, who, working with his nephew Diddy, was tasked with reclaiming a lost banana horde.



■ Arcadia's Supercharger allowed bigger, better looking, Atari 2600 games to be loaded from cassette tape. It's a footnote in the history of the system but an early indicator that the VCS's technical limitations were beginning to show in comparison to newer systems.

■ As in previous years, the arcades flourished in 1982 thanks to a vast number of excellent new games from both the US and Japan. Some of the brands established this year, such as *Xevious*, have survived to this day while others, like *Joust*, have fared less well.

IF THERE is any year in the history of videogames that can be considered a calm before the storm, then it is 1982. One year before the videogame crash of '83, and three before Nintendo swept in to change the course of gaming forever, this was the last year of the classic age to represent business as usual... though the seeds of the changes to come were clearly there if you were paying attention.

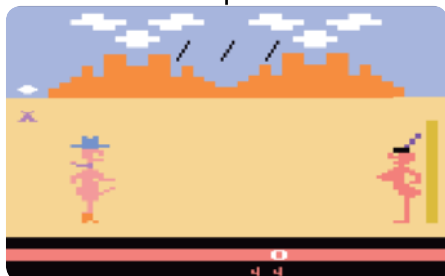
Though they were a few years from reaching the zenith of their popularity, home microcomputers really got their start in 1982 on both sides of the Atlantic. In the USA, Commodore released its successor to the Vic 20 in the form of the Commodore 64. A supremely powerful computer for the time, and released at a price that easily undercut all of its underpowered rivals, the C64 immediately gained a foothold in the market and became the primary system of choice for a number of game developers, including Electronic Arts and Lucasfilm Games, which were both formed in the same year. That home success was later repeated in the UK and Europe, making the Commodore 64 a worldwide success used almost entirely for gaming. It went on to become the most popular home computer of all time, in production for a staggering twelve years.

In the UK, there was a computer revolution of a typically more quaint size. After a couple of years of selling affordable kit-based computers to hobbyist engineers and programmers, inventor and entrepreneur Clive Sinclair hit the big time with the ZX Spectrum, his full-colour microcomputer sold on the back of an incredibly affordable price tag

YEAR IN 19

NOTABLE

CUSTER'S REVENGE



■ AN INFAMOUS release for the Atari 2600, *Custer's Revenge* was made by a company known for pornographic games, and featured the apparent rape of a native American woman at the hands of General Custer. After complaints, the game was reissued as *Westward Ho*, with alterations to make the sex appear consensual.

TRON



where the protagonist became trapped inside a computer and had to compete in deadly videogames brought to life. The coin-op adaptation was actually released before the film itself.

■ A REAL sign that videogames had entered into the collective consciousness of popular culture, Disney's *Tron* used newfangled computer graphics technology to create a film

XEVIOUS



■ AFTER MAKING a splash with the *Space Invaders*-inspired *Galaxian* and *Galaga*, Namco returned to the shoot-'em-up genre with an original and influential arcade game. Impressing gamers with its full colour, scrolling visuals, *Xevious* stood out thanks to the way you could drop bombs in addition to shooting forward.

STORY OF GAMES

1983 1984 1985 1986

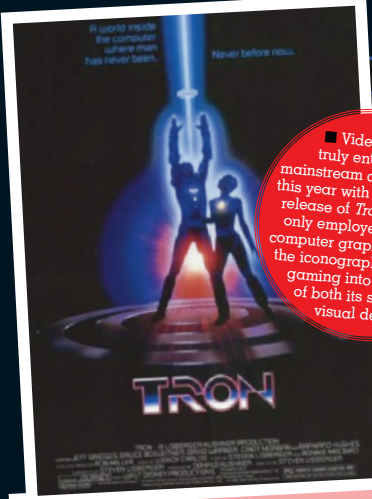
of under £100. Unlike the C64, which mostly garnered support from big software studios, the Spectrum became the favourite system of bedroom programmers; self-taught game developers who got into the business through the Spectrum's hugely accessible BASIC programming language and built their hobby into an empire. Which is exactly what Leicestershire school boys Tim and Chris Stamper did in 1982, developing their own games from home and publishing them with the help of the family under the name of Ultimate Play The Game, which later transformed into Rare – one of the UK's biggest and brightest development talents

Home computers were certainly in their ascendance but consoles weren't quite done yet. The Vectrex, a home console with a built-in vector monitor, launched this year, as did the Colecovision, an unlikely contender from the Connecticut Leather Company, which managed to strike a substantial blow against the Atari VCS and Intellivision thanks largely to its superior home conversion of *Donkey Kong*.

As for the ageing Atari VCS, it couldn't have had a better year. 1982 saw the five year-old console pass the 10-million-units-sold mark, no doubt helped along by the release of *Pac-Man* (which itself managed to shift an incredible 7 million copies) as well as the fact that Atari had finally given its blessing to third-party publishers in the wake of Activision's foundation, paving the way for a flood of new games to keep VCS owners happy. But the benefits of that flood would soon turn to negative consequences in the year to come...

REVIEW

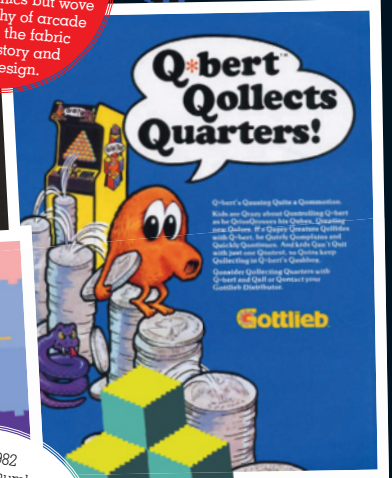
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■ Videogames truly entered the mainstream consciousness this year with the cinematic release of *Tron*, which not only employed high-tech computer graphics but wove the iconography of arcade gaming into the fabric of both its story and visual design.

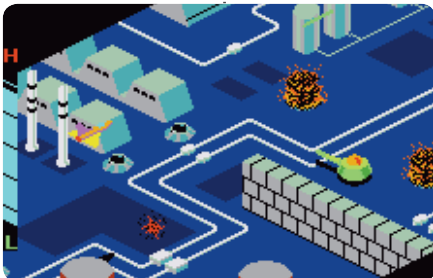


■ 1982 included a number of notable 'firsts', including *Q*bert*, the first videogame hero to be capable of swearing, and *The Empire Strikes Back* on Atari 2600, the first of many videogames to be based on the *Star Wars* series of films.



RELEASES

ZAXXON



■ ANOTHER SHOOTER with a difference, *Zaxxon* was developed by Sega and used the isometric perspective to bring a fresh touch to the genre. However, while *Zaxxon* initially proved popular, the isometric perspective wasn't suited to the shoot-and-dodge nature of the genre's gameplay, and very few games followed in its stead.

DONKEY KONG JUNIOR



■ WHILE MOST sequels often merely offer more of the same, Nintendo's sequel to *Donkey Kong* bucked the trend by reversing the concept. Putting you in control of DK's son, it tasked you with rescuing the ape from an unusually villainous Mario and transformed the gameplay from running and jumping to climbing in the process.

DEVELOPER of the YEAR

George Lucas

■ Though not a true game developer as such, the world's most successful 'independent' filmmaker, George Lucas, has had a profound effect on the videogames industry, especially in its formative years. Riding high on the success of *Star Wars*, Lucas set up a variety of new companies throughout the Seventies and Eighties – most significantly Lucasfilm Games. Supported by bottomless pits of money, Lucasfilm Games was initially afforded a luxury of time and experimentation that most studios just don't have, and it resulted in some excellent games in its first decade, particularly Ron Gilbert's series of brilliant point-and-click adventures. Thanks, *Star Wars*!

EXTENDED PLAY: 1982

E.T. THE EXTRA TERRESTRIAL

Each month we select one of the most interesting or important games from our year in review... This month, it's the game that supposedly killed the industry



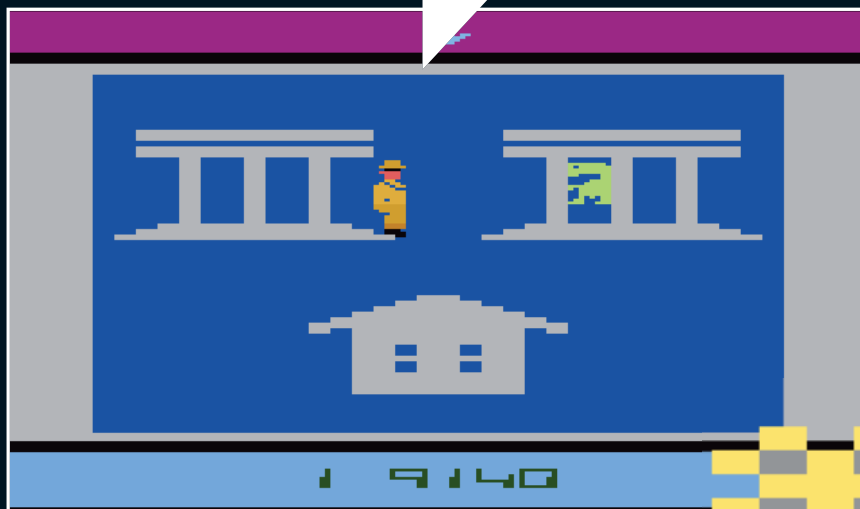
DESIGNED over a weekend and developed to completion in just over a month, Atari's adaptation of *E.T. The Extra Terrestrial* was rushed to market so quickly that it was a miracle that designer Howard Scott Warshaw was able to create anything functional at all. Overproduced in such quantities that it would be impossible to sell out, and its remaining millions of cartridges reportedly (though probably not in reality) buried in the desert, *E.T.* lost millions for Atari and played a significant part in the decline of consumer confidence that led to the crash of the games market in 1983. We all know the story by now, retold as it has been over the years – not least within these pages – but

what's less often discussed is the quality of the game itself. Though not entirely to blame for the negative customer reaction, *E.T.*'s gameplay definitely did the title few favours.

Working at a time when very few movies had been adapted into interactive form, Warshaw faced the difficult task of translating a narrative art into one that mostly revolves around action and chose to focus on the quest element of

E.T.'s plot. Centred around the challenge of finding and collecting machine parts to enable *E.T.* to phone home necessitated an exploration-adventure-type game, which had at least worked wonders for Atari's *Adventure*, released in 1980, so there was no reason it couldn't work here. Yet there were a few factors that prevented Warshaw's game from achieving the same success, such as the layout, which confusingly organised the screens of the game onto an unseen cube. If you weren't aware of this fact then navigating the space could be very confusing as you re-appeared on screens you'd already visited – a problem not faced by the more maze-like walled areas of *Adventure*.

ONE OF THE BEST-SELLING COMMERCIAL FAILURES IN THE HISTORY OF GAMES



Do you remember the bit in *E.T.* when the long-necked alien hero visits a Roman colosseum? Us neither. But then we don't remember him being chased by one of the ad guys from *Mad Men* either.



E.T. clumsily falls into every hole in the ground but his pursuer doesn't. Unfair.

S T O R Y O F G A M E S

1983-----1984-----1985-----1986-----



there was always the chance that you'd accidentally fall back in again. Couple this with the way E.T.'s adult enemies would chase him from screen to screen and you have a recipe for disaster, where most of the interactivity boils down to accidentally falling in pits, climbing out, falling in again, climbing out once more, and then, if you were particularly unlucky, getting caught by an adult and dragged off to some sort of prison where the whole sorry ordeal would start again.

It's easy to see how gamers of the day were turned off by this, especially in an age where the goals of videogames tended to be clearer and more instantly gratifying, though we'd struggle to blame

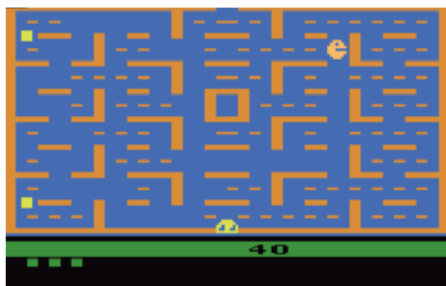
Warshaw himself. And not just because he writes amusing stories for us every month. Within the context of Atari's unrealistic development schedule, the scope and complexity of *E.T.* should have resulted in a disaster of game, yet the final product was at least playable despite its flaws. With a few weeks spent in focus testing and refinement – a luxury Atari usually afforded its VCS games – this may have even turned into something good. Instead, at 1.5 million copies sold out of an estimated 5 million produced, *E.T. The Extra Terrestrial's* only achievement is the curious distinction of being one of the best-selling commercial failures in the history of games.

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

■ **AT THE beginning of 1983, the videogames business faced a striking drop in consumer confidence, thanks in some part to negative reaction to both *E.T. The Extra Terrestrial* and the disappointing (yet commercially**

successful) conversion of *Pac-Man*, as well as an over-saturation of games consoles and software. Something had to give, and the American public simply stopped buying videogames in their millions. Reports of the games industry's

death were greatly exaggerated, however. It merely switched focus to home computers for a few years, while some developers returned to consoles with the advent of the Nintendo Entertainment System in 1985. But that's a tale for a future issue...



THE SEQUELS

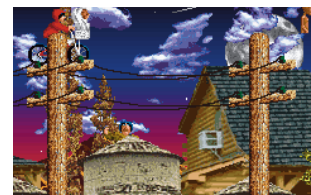
E.T. PHONE HOME (1983)



■ Made for Atari's 8-bit computers, *Phone Home* put you in control of Elliot rather than E.T., but

was conceptually similar to the VCS game, requiring you to locate and assemble parts of the transmitter while avoiding adults.

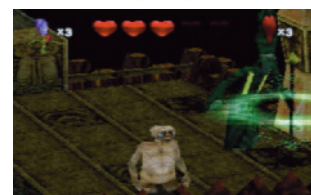
E.T. THE EXTRA TERRESTRIAL (2001)



■ Another 'assemble the broken transmitter' concept, this one culminated in the iconic

bicycle-flying sequence from the film – an idea we can't help but think Warshaw should have used for the VCS game.

E.T. INTERPLANETARY MISSION (2002)



■ Made to coincide with the 20th anniversary re-release of the film, this PSone/PC game is

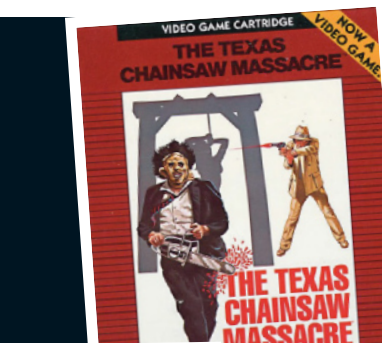
more of a sequel, and sees E.T. travelling to different planets to heal and collect various species of plantlife.

E.T. AND THE COSMIC GARDEN (2002)



■ Made by the Pickford Brothers for Game Boy Color, this 20th anniversary release

was aimed primarily at children and was essentially a gardening game, a bit like *Harvest Moon*. But less romantic.



■ It didn't take long for the games industry to learn that licensed games were an easy sell. And it didn't take too much longer than that to realise that those games didn't have to be that good either. This is how over-saturation happens. And very little has changed since.



■ By 1983, Nintendo was making a big splash in Japan with the Famicom, but here in the West it was still best known for a handful of arcade games and its Game & Watch handheld series. Quality games like *Punch-Out!!* only hinted at the greatness to come.



■ THERE ARE a lot of misconceptions about the great American videogame crash of 1983, about how a crappy *E.T.* game was somehow responsible for killing Atari, or how the public lost interest in games all of a sudden, or how there were so many bad games on shelves that gamers just got confused and walked away. And while there is some truth in all of these things, the crash is just not that simple.

People weren't buying fewer games: they were buying *more*. Believe it or not, game sales were at an all-time high in 1983. According to industry reports at the time, 75 million game cartridges were sold during the year, up from 60 million the previous year. People were still buying games: the problem was, they weren't paying full price for them.

As history would eventually teach us, the market can only sustain about three game consoles at a time. When 1983 began, Americans had about nine to choose from, with more on the way. And that didn't even include the glut of home computers flooding the market, many of them not much more than game consoles with keyboards.

Not only were there too many systems, but there were also too many games. Ambitious new companies would start up, make a game, ship it to stores, find that nobody was buying it, and be forced to close shop. There were just too many other games to choose from, and no one to govern which games could be sold and which ones couldn't. Unlike today, you didn't have to work with a console maker

YEAR IN 19

NOTABLE

I, ROBOT



■ **THOUGH ITS** cartridge division was struggling through mismanagement and financial crises, Atari's arcade division continued to innovate. *I, Robot's* 3D polygons make it look like an early PlayStation game, twelve years before its time.

STAR WARS



■ **ANOTHER ATARI** coin-op hit, *Star Wars* was arguably the first licensed game that got it right. With its high-res vector graphics, sit-down cockpit, movie voice samples and custom-made flight sticks, gamers *were* Luke Skywalker, flying an X-Wing past enemy TIE Fighters and destroying the Death Star.

ONE-ON-ONE



■ **WHEN ELECTRONIC ARTS** made its debut in 1983 it had a lot of innovative ideas, including treating its game designers like rock stars and, in an industry first, paying celebrities to lend their likenesses to games. *Julius Erving Vs. Larry Bird One-On-One* paved the way for franchises like *Madden*, *Tiger Woods* and *FIFA*.

STORY OF GAMES

1984 1985 1986 1987

back then: literally anyone could make and sell an Atari 2600 game, and just about everyone did.

Quaker Oats opened a videogame division. Ralston Purina sold a game based on its dog food, while Johnson & Johnson sold a game about toothpaste. There was a game about Kool-Aid, about the television sitcom *M*A*S*H**, the band Journey (yes, the 'Wheel In The Sky' guys) and about the mostly forgotten Eighties getting-laid comedy *Porky's*. Though it never came out, there was even a videogame in development based on *Flesh Gordon*, the cringeworthy porno parody movie from the Seventies.

The games didn't sell, their makers went out of business, and stores were left with excess stock they were forced to clear off the shelves. A good developer like Activision would try to release a hot new game at \$35, but when faced with the choice at the store, most gamers ignored it and walked away with an armful of \$5 games instead.

It's all a little bit more complicated than that, but that's the gist of the crash. Most game companies died, and the few that survived did so making computer games, albeit with far fewer staff members than before.

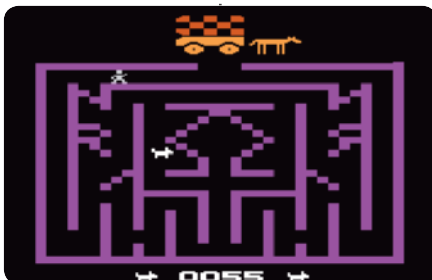
Meanwhile, in Japan, an arcade game company called Nintendo released a system of its own. Two years later, the system would be introduced to the United States, fixing everything that was wrong with the old industry and ensuring the future of videogames. But that's another story.

REVIEW

83

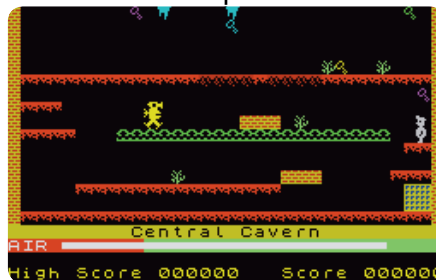
RELEASES

CHASE THE CHUCK WAGON



■ THE PINNACLE of bad videogame licensing decisions, *Chase The Chuck Wagon* is a promotional game about dog food, based on a popular commercial of the time. It is something of a holy grail among classic game collectors, but strictly because of its absurdity: the game itself is best described as 'dog crap'.

MANIC MINER



■ THE SERIES that would eventually spawn *Jet Set Willy* and (the cancelled) *Mega Tree* began in 1983 on the ZX Spectrum, and what a game it was: the standout platform title had such innovative features as in-game music, sound effects, jumping mechanics and, of course, one of the most iconic Game Over screens of all time.

DEVELOPER —of the— YEAR Danielle Bunten Berry

■ While she had been programming games at least five years, Danielle (who was still calling herself Dan at the time) released *M.U.L.E.* in 1983, the granddaddy of all party games. This addictive, simple resource management game enabled four people to play against each other without resorting to violence, and is the precursor to titles like *Mario Party*. Dani followed this up with historical sim *Seven Cities Of Gold*, an early online multiplayer game called *Modem Wars*, and proto-RTS *Global Conquest* before lung cancer claimed her life in 1998, leaving behind a body of work that can almost universally be considered ahead of its time.



■ Early videogame adverts were as primitive as the games themselves. Bugged down by an abundance of text and cheesy slogans, it took decades for them to achieve a level of sophistication in line with other entertainment forms.



■ After Activision proved that it was both possible and legal to publish your own Atari 2600 games, a flood of imitators followed. Sadly, very few of them had the game design expertise of Activision's band of ex-Atari employees.



EXTENDED PLAY: 1983

DRAGON'S LAIR

Each month we select one of the most interesting or important games from our year in review.... This month, things get a little bit more animated



The year: 1983. The scene: any one of the several dozen dimly lit, smoke-and-delinquent-filled videogame parlours in your local neighborhood. You scan the machines, as you always do, barely noticing a difference between the low resolution, blocky graphics from one screen to the next, before seeing a crowd gathered around a game you've never seen before. The crowd is strangely quiet. You make your way through and catch a glimpse at what's on the monitor, and at first you're confused: why is a Disney cartoon playing on that arcade monitor, and why is everyone watching it?

Then, suddenly, it sinks in. The guy up front is manipulating a joystick and occasionally slapping a button. The hero of the cartoon seems to be dying over

and over again. The guy at the helm is getting frustrated. This is no cartoon: this is a game, and it's the best looking game you've ever seen. This is *Dragon's Lair*.

"I've never seen a game this crowded," an arcade manager told a New York Times reporter just after *Dragon's Lair* came out. "There have literally been 15 people crowded around the machine."

The story of *Dragon's Lair* follows a somewhat clumsy knight named Dirk the Daring in his attempt to save one Princess

Daphne from the clutches of a mean dragon. If *Dragon's Lair* looks like a Disney cartoon, it's for a good reason: the game was animated at a studio led by Don Bluth, the ex-Disney animator who defected in the late Seventies to go independent. The game's design is simplistic: utilising a laserdisc player inside of the cabinet, it simply plays a pre-recorded movie on the screen (though the sequences are randomised) and pays attention to what the player does. If the player moves the joystick and/or taps the button precisely when the game wants him to, the movie continues playing. If the player makes the wrong decision (or his timing is off), the movie cuts to a death scene and the player loses a life.

The result was not so much a game as a memory test. There was really very little skill required to be a good *Dragon's*

ONE OF THE BEST-SELLING COMMERCIAL FAILURES IN THE HISTORY OF GAMES



■ Don Bluth came to *Dragon's Lair* fresh from his popular film *The Secret Of NIMH*, but he also had a long stint at Disney on films like *The Jungle Book* and *Robin Hood*.

■ As well as sequels and console spin-offs, *Dragon's Lair* spawned a short-lived animated TV series that ran for one season from 1984 to 1985.



■ The best conversions of *Dragon's Lair* are the versions that stream straight from DVD or Blu-ray.



■ *Dragon's Lair* has recently been released on iOS devices, and is optimised for the smaller screen.


Lair player, other than spending a lot of money on trial-and-error practicing (paying two credits a pop, usually, which was rare at the time) and having good memory retention.

■■■■ EVEN STILL, the appeal of the game is undeniable, even today, and sent players into a frenzy (albeit a temporary one) at the time. Many in the industry saw it as the saviour of the arcade. Dealers liked how popular the machines were (it sold about 7,300 machines in its first month at \$4,000 each for a total revenue of about \$29 million, not bad for a \$3 million investment), players dug the graphics, and arcade operators liked that the game came on a laserdisc, meaning that in theory they could upgrade their \$4,000 investments by

simply swapping the discs for an entirely new game.

Unfortunately for Dirk (and his publisher, Cinematronics), the honeymoon didn't last.

The machine's laserdisc players, which were never designed for the strain of an interactive game, broke down rapidly and were in constant need of repair. Even if the tech were to keep up, though, the interest level couldn't: once the initial excitement subsided, players became bored with the game, and operators were stuck with expensive cabinets that weren't bringing in many quarters – when they happened to work, that is.

Still, the game is fondly remembered, and its legacy lives on to this day, with versions available on just about  every system ever released.



WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

■ SEVERAL companies hopped on the laserdisc bandwagon: Data East had a helicopter shooter named *Cobra Command*, Sega released a space shooter called *Astron Belt* (which actually predates *Dragon's Lair* in development, but not release date), and Konami had a Western shooter called *Badlands* that tried to simplify things by taking away the joystick and just having one giant button to mash. The fad died

though, and not even 1984's *Dragon's Lair* follow-up, *Space Ace*, could revive it. Several other laserdisc titles

were announced but quickly cancelled. Our favourite unreleased title: *Space Dracula*, from Universal.



THE SEQUELS

DRAGON'S LAIR (ADAM, 1984)



■ When Coleco licensed the exclusive home rights to *Dragon's Lair*, many believed it would create a laserdisc player for its Colecovision console. Instead, it made this unique sprite-based version.

DRAGON'S LAIR II (ARCADE, 1991)

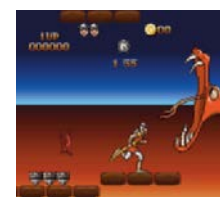


■ Though the sequel was actually completed in 1985, it didn't come out until 1991, as both of the companies behind the original were dead. The sequel is what you'd expect: more of the same.



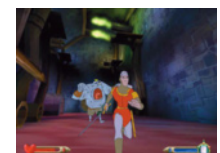
DRAGON'S LAIR (NES/GAME BOY, 1990)

■ Elite Systems picked up the home rights once Coleco's lapsed, and produced a couple of bizarre 8-bit renditions. The Game Boy one is actually a re-skin of the Spectrum platform game *Roller Coaster!*



DRAGON'S LAIR (SNES, 1992)

■ Elite's 16-bit version is a more traditional side-scrolling adventure, complete with platforming, power-ups and a few branching paths. A Mega Drive version was also made, but not released.



DRAGON'S LAIR 3D (MULTI, 2002)

■ Proving the lasting power of the *Dragon's Lair* brand, this 2002 game takes the basic concept of the original and creates a brand new 3D game, with cel-shaded graphics to mimic the original.



WANDERING THE halls of the Consumer Electronics Show at the beginning of 1984 all but confirmed what many in the industry already suspected: the home videogame industry was just about dead, the victim of an oversaturated market that grew more quickly than even the best analysts could have anticipated. Only about a dozen companies showed off new games at the trade show (the E3 of its time), compared to the thirty-or-so displaying their wares a year earlier, though the vast majority of those games were for the home computer market.

The biggest success story as the year opened was Commodore, with founder and CEO Jack Tramiel boasting that it had sold 1 million Commodore 64s and 2 million budget-priced Vic 20 computers in 1983. The biggest flop was Coleco's Adam: while the all-in-one computer was technically impressive, it was rushed to market: only about a fifth of its promised shipments made it to stores, and most of those were returned due to defects. Coleco fixed many of the Adam's issues and continued selling it for most of 1984, but the most promising computer of 1983 never became a major player.

Under new leadership from former Phillip Morris executive James Morgan, Atari refocused. Morgan laid off about two-thirds of his employees, discontinued the dead-on-arrival Atari 5200, and surprised everyone by announcing that the company would launch a brand new game player, the Atari 7800. What Morgan didn't realise was that Atari's owner, Warner Communications, was about to wash its hands of the company. Atari's divisions were split up and sold. Warner kept the arcade division (for a while), offloaded its bizarre videophone business to Mitsubishi and, most importantly, sold its home computer and videogame divisions to Jack Tramiel, who had recently resigned from the company he

YEAR IN 19

NOTABLE

ELITE



■ **SPACE TRADING** game *Elite* wowed players with its wireframe 3D graphics and a universe that seemed impossibly large, thanks to some impressive programming trickery from David Braben and Ian Bell. The open-ended nature of the game was something of an innovation at the time, it's the grandfather of sandbox games.

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY



■ **DOUGLAS ADAMS** did not just 'consult' on this hilarious text adventure based on his legendary series of books; he basically became a game developer and entrenched himself deeply, working side-by-side with co-designer and programmer Steve Meretzky. The result is an hilarious (though downright sadistic) adventure that did things game-makers hadn't dreamed of, like lying to the player.

PUNCH-OUT!!



that used two at the same time. The result is among the most delightful sport games ever made, and the beginning of a legacy.

■ **NINTENDO** CREATED *Donkey Kong* in order to have something to put into all of its unsold Raderscope cabinets. Likewise, the company created *Punch-Out!!* because, as the story goes, it had an excess of monitors and needed a game

STORY OF GAMES

1985 1986 1987 1988

founded and ran for nearly 30 years. Tramiel made it abundantly clear that the new Atari had no interest in games. He cancelled the 7800 and all games in development, cut back Atari's staff even further, and announced that the company would go quiet for a while before coming back with a new line of powerful, potentially Commodore-killing computers in 1985.

While the papers continued their doom and gloom reports about videogames being dead, game developers pressed on and introduced a number of innovative and frankly fantastic titles during the year. Dave

and Barry Murray all but created the real-time strategy genre with Broderbund's *The Ancient Art Of War*. Ultimate Play The Game put out its isometric, oft-imitated adventure game *Knight Lore*. David Braben and Ian Bell captured the imagination of an entire game-playing generation with the space exploration game *Elite*. LucasFilm Games released its first two titles, *Ballblazer* and *Rescue On Fractalus*, and Capcom debuted with its first videogame, a vertical shooter called *Vulgus*. Furthermore, Activision released *Pitfall 2* and *H.E.R.O.*, both considered among

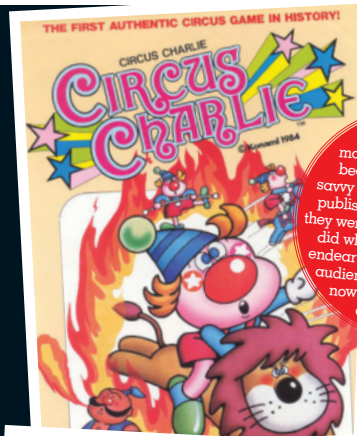
REVIEW

84

the company's best releases from the era.

Though nobody was making very much money, 1984 was a fantastic year for the millions who were still playing games. There might not have been as many of them, but the few that squeaked out were more innovative, interesting, and deep than ever before. The industry would continue to suffer for another couple of years, but as 1984 ended, Nintendo prepared itself to bring Japan's mega-popular Family Computer console to American shores, despite the advice of just about everybody it talked to. But we'll have to save that for a future article.

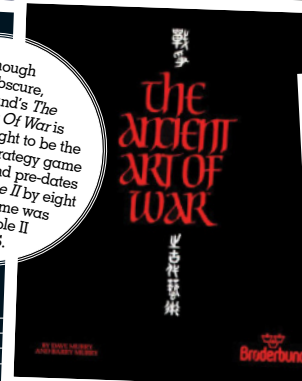
RELEASES



■ Videogame marketing was clearly becoming much more savvy by 1984. The smartest publishers were aware that they were creating brands and did whatever they could to endear their characters to its audience. Personality was now just as important as gameplay.



■ Though now obscure, Broderbund's *The Ancient Art Of War* is generally thought to be the first real-time strategy game to be created and pre-dates Westwood's *Dune II* by eight years. The game was only for Apple II and DOS.



PITFALL II



■ DESPITE THE state of things, Activision still believed there was a viable market for console games in 1984, and proved this by releasing what might be the most technically impressive game for the Atari 2600. *Pitfall II*'s enormous environment seems impossible for the console, and is a mystery for 2600 programmers to this day.

THE TOWER OF DRUGA



■ THOUGH IT never quite adhered to Western tastes, this 1984 action-maze arcade game captured the imagination (and Yen coins) of gamers all over Japan, who banded together to solve the elaborate and frankly absurd puzzles required to get to the top of the game's tower. It was 'multiplayer' in the sense that no one could solve the game alone.

DEVELOPER of the YEAR

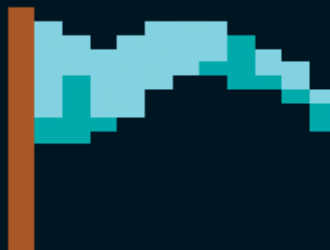
Will Wright

■ We might know Will Wright today as the supernerd who created *The Sims* and *Spore* and loves spaceships more than is healthy, but back in 1984 Wright was a struggling home programmer who released his very first game, *Raid On Bungeling Bay*. The game was a minor success (and a Japanese version for Nintendo's Family Computer put a lot of money in Wright's pocket), but the game is more notable for the tool that Wright used to build the game's cities. Wright continued working on the engine and eventually made it into its own game, *Sim City*, which inspired more games than we have room to list.



EXTENDED PLAY: 1984

KING'S QUEST



Each month we select one of the most interesting or important games from our year in review.... This month, we incorrectly guess a gnome's stupid name

IBM (you may have heard of it) wanted to enter the home computer market with a bang by releasing games that showed off the unique graphics and sound capabilities of its new PCjr computer. To do this it commissioned the graphic adventure designers at Sierra On-Line (consisting primarily of the husband-and-wife team of Ken and Roberta Williams) to come up with a colourful new game.

Prior graphical adventures were little more than text adventures with still pictures – a genre that Sierra more or less created with 1980's *Mystery House*. *King's Quest* blew players away with a rich 16-color palette and animated characters that moved around in a 3D space. Sir Graham (named after graham crackers, designer Roberta Williams' favourite snack) could walk in front of, around and behind trees and castles and other characters, creating a more tangible and real world than any game before it.

It looked like a graphically advanced arcade game, except that it was being played on an affordable home computer.



King Graham is the main protagonist in each game, except for 1998's *King's Quest: Mask Of Eternity*.

It also had a rich narrative full of unique characters and puzzles. It combined the best of both worlds: the brainy intellectualism of a computer adventure and the slick presentation and avatar controls of an arcade game.

King's Quest was the ultimate love letter to fairy tales. Players would find lost treasures, meet dragons and leprechauns, bypass a troll on a bridge, enter a gingerbread house, guess Rumpelstiltskin's name

(thanks to one of the most hated puzzles in adventure game history, his name is typed 'Ifnkovhgrogghprn'), and even climb a giant beanstalk into the clouds.

This was, of course, the granddaddy of what we today refer to as adventure games. Undeniable classics like *Grim Fandango*, *Simon The Sorcerer*, *The Secret Of Monkey Island*, *The Longest Journey*, and Sierra's own *Leisure Suit Larry* and *Space Quest* all owe a bit of humbling gratitude to the hard work of Sierra On-Line.

KING'S QUEST WAS POSSIBLY THE MOST EXPENSIVE GAME OF ITS DAY

KING'S QUEST was quite possibly the most expensive game of its day. In an age where most computer games were pumped out by about one to three programmers in maybe a couple of months, the original release of *King's Quest* took a full year and a half to develop, and has eleven people in its credits.



> talk to man
Welcome to my humble abode.
>

Though *King's Quest* quickly began to look old and outdated, especially next to the superior-looking Lucasfilm Games productions that followed, it definitely has an unmistakable retro charm in hindsight.



■ If you've never played Telltale's *Strong Bad* game, it's worth it for the spoof of this sequence alone.



■ *King's Quest* was re-released in 1987 with much better visuals, though we still have a soft spot for this one.

Ultimately the game flopped, but it wasn't Sierra's fault: like the Adam before it, IBM's overhyped PCjr failed to excite consumers at release. Despite being produced by the industry leader in business computers, IBM's first attempt to bring itself into the home was plagued by strange decisions that included shipping with a ZX Spectrum-like 'chiclet' keyboard, which as anyone who has used one can tell you is not at all suitable for anything but casual typing. It also cost way too much for the market at the time: while it might have been substantially beefier than the Commodore 64 in terms of its processing abilities, it also cost more than twice as much and didn't have nearly the same level of software support.

With Atari and Commodore commanding the low-cost computer space and Apple comfortably controlling the high-end market, IBM's entry was something of a middle-of-the-road oddity that never caught on, and so *King's Quest*'s first release inevitably resulted in a financial loss.

Of course, that's not the end of the story. Sierra would later market the game for other computers (including those made by Apple and Atari, among others) and find enough success to not only continue the franchise, but to expand the genre to places King Graham could never have suspected, including an outer-space broom closet, a metropolitan police station, and a dive bar named Lefty's with a suspicious back room.

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

■ SIERRA saw many imitators over the years, but for most of the Eighties it was the king of graphical adventure games, which exploded into the most popular computer game genre for a brief but beautiful time that most of us remember through teary eyes. It wasn't until LucasFilm's *Maniac Mansion* in 1987 that a serious contender appeared, though the competition turned out to be a good thing: Sierra continued

creating wonderful adventure games for traditional players with deliciously frustrating puzzles, and LucasFilm created a take on the

genre that was a lot friendlier. And then the whole genre kind of died, but we don't want to talk about that, because it still hurts.



THE SEQUELS

KING'S QUEST III: TO HEIR IS HUMAN (1986)



■ While *King's Quest II* continued Graham's story, its sequel saw a dramatic departure, with players taking on the role of an anonymous slave escaping from his cruel wizard master.

KING'S QUEST V: ABSENCE MAKES THE HEART GO YONDER! (1990)



■ One of the first games to cost over \$1 million to make, *King's Quest V* was the first to take advantage of a 256-color VGA palette, and the first to ditch text input entirely for a mouse-driven gameplay experience.

KING'S QUEST VII: THE PRINCESS BRIDE (1994)



■ Most fans consider *King's Quest VI* to be the series' highlight, which made *VII*'s sudden shift to Disney-like animation and a simplified interface a jarring change to the franchise.

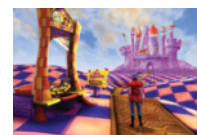
KING'S QUEST: MASK OF ETERNITY (1998)



■ If *VII* seemed like a strange departure, its sequel – the final Sierra-made entry in the series – seemed like a different

game completely, with its 3D world and its emphasis on twitchy combat.

THE SILVER LINING (2010)



■ While this free episodic game series is not an official *King's Quest* game, it is seen by many fans (including

series creator Roberta Williams) as a true continuation of the franchise, and a return to form.

1981 1982 1983 1984

THE COMPLETE HI



■ Face the truth, games™ readers. 1985 is the year videogames became properly cool. Just look at this lot... *Gradius*, *Ghosts'n Goblins*, *Indy*! In fact, it's entirely possible that videogames have been trapped in an endless downward spiral of cool for the past 26 years. Right?

■ Capcom went into overdrive in 1985, releasing such memorable arcade classics as *Commando* and *Gun. Smoke*. This is also the year it got into console ports with its NES version of *1942*, beginning a long and fruitful relationship with Nintendo.

■ AT THE BEGINNING of January 1985, at a lavish trade show in Las Vegas, Nintendo of America introduced its now-legendary Nintendo Entertainment System to the United States for the very first time. Hardly anyone noticed, and the few who did just scoffed.

"Everybody really thought we were just crazy or dumb," former president Minoru Arakawa once recalled.

Even *Electronic Games* – the only videogame magazine left in the country – called Nintendo's plans to release the system a "miscalculation." Home videogames were dead. Kids were still filling new arcade games to the brim with their quarters, and software developers were still making a living making computer games, but the lucrative home videogame market was dead and buried, the victim of several miscalculations of its own.

Still, Nintendo had a great product with the NES. The games looked and played better than any system before it: almost as good as the arcades. And besides, Japan loved it. Its Eastern equivalent, the Family Computer, was a runaway success, with 2.5 million consoles and 15 million games sold in 1984 alone. It was lighting the fires of a home console revolution in the country, causing companies like Sega to enter the race with a console of its own.

Nintendo tried and ultimately failed to get any stores interested in its new system at the show. What the company showed off was vastly different from the NES we know and love today. In fact, it even had a different name – the Advanced Video System (AVS). It had

YEAR IN 19

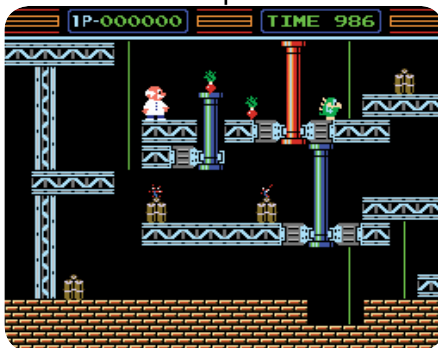
NOTABLE

WHERE IN THE WORLD IS CARMEN SANDIEGO?



■ WAY BACK in 1985, *Where In The World Is Carmen Sandiego?* accomplished something that even the most seasoned game designers struggle with today: it was an educational game that people genuinely wanted to play. You might say that Carmen's greatest heist of all was stealing gamers' hearts. We're so sorry.

GYROMITE



■ THE GAME itself might not be great – okay, it's kind of crap – but *Gyromite* and its R.O.B. the Robot accessory just might have been the Trojan Horse that helped the world warm to the NES. Early Nintendo marketing focused on R.O.B.: it's not a videogame, it's a robot toy...

GAUNTLET



■ GAUNTLET COULDN'T have come at a more perfect time, as teens swept up in *Dungeons & Dragons* mania gravitated immediately to its sword and sorcery theme. *Gauntlet* excited gamers at the time by being the first multiplayer game where everyone played a different character, and one of the few where everyone worked together.

S T O R Y O F G A M E S

1986 1987 1988 1989

a sleek design, wireless controllers, optional keyboard accessories (both of the musical and typing varieties) and even a tape drive, promising like every console had for most of the Eighties that it could be expanded into an educational computer. It differentiated itself from the game consoles before it by trying to outclass them with state-of-the-art technology. However, the store buyers at the show weren't fooled: this was still a videogame, and videogames weren't selling.

The company went back to the drawing board, as it were, and simplified the design in time to try again at another show in June, this time with what would be the final design of the NES. Rather than go for the technophile angle, this time Nintendo made its system more of a toy. It had a wide shape that Nintendo employees begrudgingly described as "the lunchbox". Its games didn't come on cartridges, but 'game paks'. And just to drive the point home, it came with a toy gun and a little robot that interacted with your TV.

Buyers still looked the other way, so Nintendo took matters into its own hands. That Winter, just to test its theory that kids still wanted to buy videogames, it literally bought its way into the market, renting space in New York's finest toy and department stores and having employees ranging from its warehouse workers to its president standing around giving demonstrations direct to consumers.

The gamble worked. New Yorkers gobbled up the system and most of its games (just about nobody bought *Donkey Kong Jr. Math*), proving Arakawa's theory correct. The next year the NES would go national, changing videogame history forever.

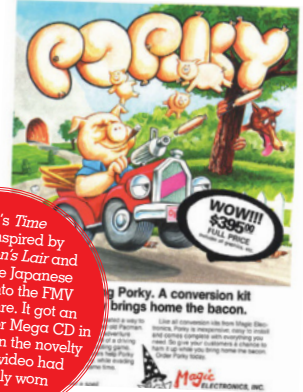
REVIEW

85

RELEASES



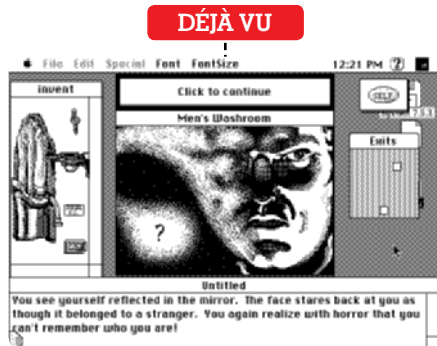
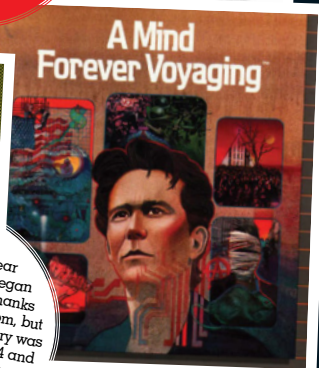
■ Taito's *Time Gal* was inspired by 1983's *Dragon's Lair* and injected some Japanese anime cool into the FMV adventure genre. It got an enhanced port for Mega CD in 1991, but by then the novelty of interactive video had well and truly worn thin.



ing Porky. A conversion kit brings home the bacon. Use all conversion kits from Mega Drive, Mega-CD, Mega-2, Mega-3, Mega-4, Mega-5, Mega-6, Mega-7, Mega-8, Mega-9, Mega-10, Mega-11, Mega-12, Mega-13, Mega-14, Mega-15, Mega-16, Mega-17, Mega-18, Mega-19, Mega-20, Mega-21, Mega-22, Mega-23, Mega-24, Mega-25, Mega-26, Mega-27, Mega-28, Mega-29, Mega-30, Mega-31, Mega-32, Mega-33, Mega-34, Mega-35, Mega-36, Mega-37, Mega-38, Mega-39, Mega-40, Mega-41, Mega-42, Mega-43, Mega-44, Mega-45, Mega-46, Mega-47, Mega-48, Mega-49, Mega-50, Mega-51, Mega-52, Mega-53, Mega-54, Mega-55, Mega-56, Mega-57, Mega-58, Mega-59, Mega-60, Mega-61, Mega-62, Mega-63, Mega-64, Mega-65, Mega-66, Mega-67, Mega-68, Mega-69, Mega-70, Mega-71, Mega-72, Mega-73, Mega-74, Mega-75, Mega-76, Mega-77, Mega-78, Mega-79, Mega-80, Mega-81, Mega-82, Mega-83, Mega-84, Mega-85, Mega-86, Mega-87, Mega-88, Mega-89, Mega-90, Mega-91, Mega-92, Mega-93, Mega-94, Mega-95, Mega-96, Mega-97, Mega-98, Mega-99, Mega-100.



■ 1985 may have been the year that the Japanese began to take over, mostly thanks to Nintendo and Capcom, but the British games industry was still going strong on C64 and Spectrum. The NES was virtually irrelevant here, even after its 1986 UK release.



■ We all think of LucasArts and Sierra as being the pioneers of the adventure game genre, but it was ICOM Simulations and its 1985 hard-boiled detective adventure *Déjà Vu* that truly created the point-and-click genre. Indeed, it was among the first games to utilise the mouse at all – and it's a pretty good game too.



■ IT WAS 1985's *Space Harrier* that defined Sega as the punk rock game development powerhouse it would be for the next decade or so. In addition to being really very weird indeed, it also employed a sprite-scaling trick that created a 3D effect that still stands as being pretty convincing today.

DEVELOPER —of the— YEAR Noah Falstein

■ LucasArts veteran Noah Falstein might not get the spotlight recognition of Ron Gilbert or Tim Schafer, but his contributions – whether behind the scenes or as a project leader – were vital to the company's golden years. In 1985 he released his first game for the company – *Koronis Rift* – which, despite technically taking place inside of a tank, is in many ways a predecessor to the modern first-person shooter.

Falstein stayed on through the company's transition into an adventure game powerhouse, contributing to titles like *The Secret Of Monkey Island* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, and even taking the co-design reins on both *Indiana Jones* adventures. As a consultant, Falstein is still an active game designer to this day.



EXTENDED PLAY: 1985



SUPER MARIO BROS.

Each month we select one of the most interesting or important games from our year in review... This month, we take the obvious route and gush about Mario!

AS WITH ALL of his games, designer Shigeru Miyamoto began the creation of what became *Super Mario Bros.* with one simple concept: a large character jumping around on screen.

Specifically, he wanted to follow up 1983's *Mario Bros.* with a bigger and brighter sequel, as he lamented that the original "didn't scroll, the background was black, and it was sort of plain."

As he continued building on the idea, he and his small team built on the foundations of his previous games. Miyamoto wanted *Super Mario Bros.* to be the ultimate cartridge videogame, the culmination of everything that had come before it. He took the floating platforms from *Donkey Kong*, the climbable vines from *Donkey Kong Jr.*, the enemy patterns and smashable blocks from *Mario Bros.*, and even the scrolling and "warp zones" from *Excitebike* to build his adventure.

Miyamoto and his team cut corners wherever they could to have enough memory for his grand epic – the clouds and the bushes use the same sprites, stomping

on enemies and swimming used the same sound effect (no, really), and the castle windows are recycled doors, to name a few examples – but for a 1985 audience hungry for something new, the results were stunning.

In the historical context of all of the Famicom games that came before it, *Super Mario Bros.* felt like it came from another planet. Rather than a simple arcade-style game with ground rules that had to be obeyed, *Super Mario Bros.* simply told the player to go. Mario was on a mission to rescue the princess, and as the game opens, we know that she's

somewhere to the right. Other than that, anything could happen.

Players would venture through a world with different geographies, flora and fauna. They would discover secret underground paths, have adventures under the sea and explore evil castles. They would climb vines into the sky and hop on clouds, outsmart giant monsters, and fall to their deaths over and over again into bottomless holes and rivers of lava.

It's hard to appreciate now, but even the simple gesture of having a blue sky made *Super Mario Bros.* feel more ambitious and alive than any game before it. And the effect became even more pronounced when, a few levels in, the sky turned black, suggesting that Mario's tireless journey had taken him all the way into the night.

MIYAMOTO WANTED SUPER MARIO BROS. TO BE THE ULTIMATE CARTRIDGE GAME



■ Mario's underground stages offered secret exits that were truly mind blowing back in 1985.



■ Hit the water in most retro platform games and you'd inexplicably die upon contact with the surface. In *Mario*, however, you could venture beneath for a different sort of adventure. What a versatile hero.



■ One criticism of *Super Mario Bros.* is that the boss battles were a bit samey. This changed in the sequels.



■ As is typical of the series, Lakitu started as an incidental enemy but soon became more prominent.

Before *Super Mario Bros.*, home videogames were content with merely trying to recreate the arcade experience in the comfort of people's own home. But Miyamoto's masterpiece provided the language and framework that inspired the golden age of console games that came after it.

Arcade games in 1985 were quick, addictive, and outclassed other kinds of videogames with superior art and sounds. Computer games operated at the opposite end of the spectrum: they might not have been pretty (often they didn't even have graphics), but they provided a deep, rich experience catered to the sophisticated home computer user of the time.



Super Mario Bros. was the first game to find the perfect middle-ground between the two. Not only did it more or less define both the side-scrolling and platforming genres, it provided the roadmap for what console games needed to be: fun, accessible games that took you to other worlds and demanded just enough from you to keep your attention, but not enough to scare you away.

To say that *Super Mario Bros.* was a success is a massive understatement. For over twenty years it remained the best-selling game of all time, surpassed only by Nintendo's *Wii Sports*. Its star continues to appear in multiple games a year, over 25 years later, and the game is still as accessible and enjoyable for kids today as it was back then.



THE SEQUELS

SUPER MARIO BROS. 2 (1988)



dream worlds and vegetables.

■ While Japan got a traditional sequel (the same basic game, but with harder levels), the rest of us got a rather interesting sequel involving

SUPER MARIO BROS. 3 (1988)



harder and more grandiose.

■ This is possibly the greatest sequel of all time. *Super Mario Bros. 3* took everything that was great about the original and made it bigger, badder,

SUPER MARIO 64 (1996)



64 defined 3D console adventures, and is still better than most new ones.

■ One facet of the *Super Mario* legacy that we tend to overlook is that every new game is a technological leader. *Super Mario*

SUPER MARIO GALAXY (2007)



for wearing adorable bee costumes.

■ The latest iteration in the *Super Mario* legacy is pure, undiluted joy: joy for exploring deep space, joy for jumping around freely, and joy

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

■ WE OFTEN credit Nintendo with saving the videogame industry, but the NES might have just been a curiosity from the East without the help of *Super Mario Bros.* The character became a cultural institution almost overnight, the subject of many schoolyard discussions and daydreams. Nintendo cashed in on this with Mario cartoons, Mario clothing,

Mario bedsheets, party items, stickers, socks, wall clocks, boxes, ice cream treats and cereal, to name just a few items. And in game development, the basic

formula of running to the right and jumping past enemies has been used and reused pretty much since the game's debut, and has shown no sign of getting old.



NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. WII (2009)



do with *Super Mario Bros.* It takes the basic formula, but allows the rest of the family to play too.

■ Miyamoto has often said that *New Super Mario Bros. Wii* is the culmination of what he set out to

1982-----1983-----1984-----1985

T H E C O M P L E T E H I



■ 1986 was an interesting year in the US. While Nintendo quickly took hold of the general videogaming public, old guards like Atari refused to let go. But the same old arcade ports we'd seen half a decade before couldn't compare to new experiences like *Metroid* and *Super Mario Bros.*

■ The NES had its fair share of arcade ports too, of course, but at least they were more faithful than those seen on rival formats, and were often coded by the same companies that created the coin-op rather than licensed to an unrelated studio.

“VIDEOGAMES, THE ENTERTAINMENT craze blamed for everything from sore thumbs to the decline of the nation's youth, are making a comeback,” warned the *New York Times* in an article dated 27 September, 1986. “The fun is back,” beamed Atari in the first commercial it bothered producing in two years. “Hold on to your joy sticks. The ‘beep’ is back in the home videogame market,” Nintendo announced in a press release.

Just as suddenly as they'd disappeared in the infamous market crash of 1983, videogames were suddenly crowding store shelves again. In October of 1985, Nintendo of America – ignoring conventional wisdom and the warnings of just about anyone it asked – introduced the Nintendo Entertainment System in a unique test market experiment in New York while the rest of the world sat back and watched.

The experiment was a success. While it wasn't exactly an overnight sell-out, the NES units, packaged in a gigantic box with R.O.B. the Robot, a *Zapper* pistol, and copies of both *Duck Hunt* and *Gyromite* (a bargain at just \$180), sat under the trees of around 100,000 lucky New York kids that Christmas morning.

The rest of the industry, or what was left of it anyway, took notice. As 1986 began and the all-important Winter Consumer Electronics Show (the E3 of its day) opened in Las Vegas, a wounded Atari scraped together any videogames it could to show retailers that it too was primed for a comeback. Next to its computers, the company displayed a newly redesigned version of its crusty old 2600, and dusted off the 7800 console it completed but never bothered releasing in 1984.

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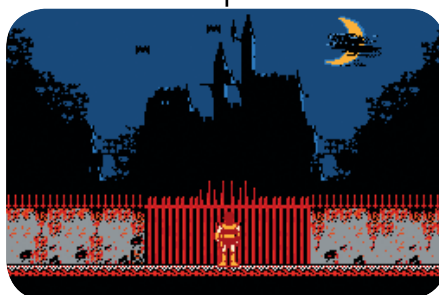
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DRAGON QUEST



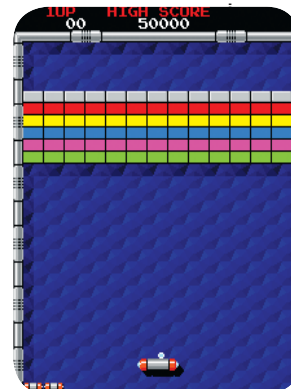
■ THERE WERE a handful of prototypical experiments before it (*Hyalide*, anyone? No?), but *Dragon Quest* was truly the beginning of what we've come to call Japanese RPGs. The game is a cultural phenomenon in Japan, and thanks to recent releases like *Dragon Quest IX* on the DS, Western gamers are getting addicted now too.

CASTLEVANIA



■ *CASTLEVANIA* – or *Akumajo Dracula* (Devil's Castle Dracula) as it was known on its 1986 Japanese debut – was a standout release for the time. The game borrowed familiar elements and set-pieces from well-known horror movies, sported an instantly hummable soundtrack, and set the stage for a franchise that will never die.

ARKANOID



■ TAITO'S *ARKANOID* is the ultimate evolution of the paddle-meets-ball concept that started with the earliest videogames. It builds on what Atari did with 1976's *Breakout* – which turned *Pong* vertical and introduced destroyable tiles – and blows it out with a fun soundtrack, a weird storyline, and multiple stages and layouts.

S T O R Y O F G A M E S

1987 1988 1989 1990

Even the Intellivision made a surprise reappearance at the show, with INTV Corp., the company that took over distribution of the system after a frustrated Mattel shut down its electronics division, showing a newly redesigned Intellivision III system. It even dug out a couple of previously-unreleased games.

Later in the year, another Japanese company, Sega, introduced a console of its own: the Master System. The Master System was the most technically advanced of the three new consoles on the market: its October 1985 debut in Japan was some two years after the Family Computer, the Japanese version of the NES.

Gamers suddenly found themselves with a lot of choices that Christmas, but Nintendo was the clear winner. As Winter approached, the system was finally available throughout the United States, and in a brilliant move, Nintendo created a new bundle that ditched the robot and the light gun in favour of a killer app: Shigeru Miyamoto's brilliant *Super Mario Bros.* With more software support, retail shelf

space, and a killer marketing campaign, the NES crushed its competition before it stood a chance, and would dominate the market for the rest of the decade.

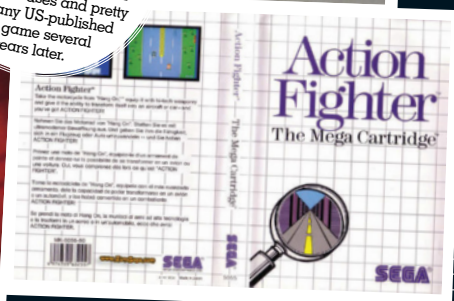
Meanwhile, the Japanese market experienced something of an artistic renaissance with Family Computer games: simple arcade ports were being phased out while developers figured out what made home consoles special. Franchises including *Metroid*, *Kid Icarus*, *Dragon Quest*, and *Castlevania* – all of them still relevant today – were birthed in 1986.



■ 1986 saw the release of the Famicom Disk System in Japan, and inspired the creation of some ambitious new games such as *The Legend Of Zelda*. Its subsequent cartridge port in the West heralded the introduction of battery-backed saves.



■ Japan's best games featured some artistically creative and exciting package art that was almost always ruined by the time it came over to the West. See all Master System releases and pretty much any US-published PS2 game several years later.



86

RELEASES

DEFENDER OF THE CROWN



■ THIS MIDDLE Ages-inspired strategy game featured what were without a doubt the most breathtaking visuals gamers had ever seen, thanks to the digital penmanship of Jim Sachs and the superior horsepower of Commodore's just-released Amiga. This was the first title from Cinemaware, a company whose story perfectly represents the over-ambition of many 1980s computer game startups.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA



■ WHAT IS there left to say about *The Legend Of Zelda* that hasn't been said before? Shigeru Miyamoto's sprawling epic, inspired by his childhood adventures, bridged the gap between the deep, story-driven experiences of computer games and the colourful, musical, twitch-based play of the best arcade and console games.

DEVELOPER
—of the—
YEAR
**Scott
Murphy**

■ The graphical adventure genre was just hitting its stride on home computers in 1986. Of the franchises that we remember fondly from the Golden Age, few bring as many smiles as Sierra's *Space Quest* series, which debuted that year.

Murphy was one half of the Two Guys From Andromeda duo that created the original games in the much-loved series: he did all of the coding and the bulk of the writing, while a brilliant pixel artist named Mark Crowe painted the strange alien worlds our hapless janitor found himself in.

Murphy has been out of game development for over a decade now, but the impact on future designers and writers of his pioneering work in videogame comedy is simply undeniable.



EXTENDED PLAY: 1986

BUBBLE BOBBLE



Each month we select one of the most interesting or important games from our year in review... This month we begin a fantastic story in the Cave of Monsters

JAPAN'S TAITO Corporation carved a permanent place for itself in videogame history with 1977's *Space Invaders*, the space shooter that was famously blamed for a Japanese yen shortage soon after its release (apparently, the game was so popular that most of the country's coins were sitting in its hoppers).

The game helped propel the company into a videogame powerhouse, becoming one of the few Japanese game-makers to open an American subsidiary during the early 1980s arcade boom. Its success helped Taito launch over 100 games over the next nine years, but with a few cult classic exceptions (*Elevator Action* and *Jungle King* come to mind) the company hadn't come up with another hit brand to call its own, a series that could live on through sequels and spin-offs like *Space Invaders* could.

That all changed in 1986 when a couple of cute bubble dragons named Bub and Bob captured hearts worldwide with a delightful little adventure called

Bubble Bobble. The game sees our stars journeying to the 'Cave of Monsters' to battle through 100 stages and rescue their girlfriends from the nefarious Baron von Blubba.



The game can almost be considered non-violent... if you don't think about it too much. Rather than shooting or stomping opponents, Bub and Bob trap them in harmless bubbles. Players can then pop

the bubbles and send the baddies flying around the room until they morph into a piece of fruit.

Though the mechanics are fairly straightforward, the number of little tweaks and bonuses that permeate the game are nearly unrivalled in its peers. The bubbles can be used as makeshift platforms. There are power-ups that increase player speed and bubble strength. There are potions that fill the entire screen with collectible flowers. There are collectable sequential letters ('EXTEND') inspired by

PLAYERS BANDED TOGETHER TO SOLVE BUBBLE BOBBLE'S MYSTERY



Bubble Bobble's cute aesthetic spawned a trend at Taito, leading to *New Zealand Story* and *Liquid Kids*.





■ Sorry we couldn't find anything more exciting than this title screen. We've all gone home for Christmas.



■ A great two-player game, *Bubble Bobble* was reportedly designed for couples to play together.


classic pinball machines, and hidden treasure rooms with secrets written in an alien language. There are secret bonuses that require very specific, obscure criteria to spawn.

The original arcade game even has a couple of cheat codes, which is very unusual in an industry where players are expected to pump money into the games to continue playing. The idea was brilliant: it created a sense of community around the game that wouldn't exist otherwise, as kids worldwide argued about its methods and cheats in the playground and held secrets to themselves like pirate booty.

Even more intriguing was the game's secret ending, with requirements so obtuse that it probably wasn't discovered for months. If a single player defeats the final boss at level 100, he will be told that he has not seen the game's 'true ending', and is sent back to an earlier level. Beating the game in its cooperative two-

player mode will indeed show a happy ending with Bub and Bob reuniting with their girlfriends, but even that is not the 'true ending', the game informs you, before giving you the cryptic clue to "write 8 big words on a paper."

We won't spoil the solution, but players banded together to solve *Bubble Bobble's* mystery, and found that the only way to see the game's true ending was to input a secret code that enabled a hideously difficult hard mode. Only then, and by beating the game with two players *without dying once*, could a dedicated Bobbler see how the game's plot was supposed to wrap up.

Taito really came into its own in 1986 with other franchises like *Arkanoid* and shoot-'em-up *Darius*, but it was *Bubble Bobble* that helped define the cute, mascot-led direction the company would go with *The New Zealand Story* and puzzle spin-off *Puzzle Bobble*. 

THE SEQUELS

RAINBOW ISLANDS: THE STORY OF BUBBLE BOBBLE 2 (1987)



■ Bub and Bob return (in human form!) for an all-new adventure that has very little to do with the original and a whole lot to do with little rainbows. This one has even more wild secrets.

PARASOL STARS (1991)



■ This console-only sequel to *Rainbow Islands* technically calls itself *The Story of Bubble Bobble III*, though it deviates from the original template much more than other games in the series, as Bub and Bob hit and deflect hordes of enemies with parasols.

PUZZLE BOBBLE (1994)



■ This puzzle game spin-off, called *Bust-A-Move* in some parts of the world, popularised the 'match-three' genre that is still ripped off by dozens of brand new Facebook games, with a new one arriving approximately every five minutes.

BUBBLE SYMPHONY (1994)



■ *Bubble Symphony* is the 'true' sequel to *Bubble Bobble*, though the NES-only *Bubble Bobble 2* is a fine game. Improvements include a bubble charge move, more bosses, and branching paths.

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?



■ TAITO RAN with the cutesy mascot games, producing titles like *The New Zealand Story*, *Insector X* and *Liquid Kids*. *Bubble Bobble* itself got ported to just about every platform imaginable, with mixed results. The fan-favourite is the Sega Master System version, which maintains most of the numerous secrets of the original.

In fact, the game is mostly remembered today not for its original arcade incarnation, but for its Nintendo Entertainment System version, which was published early enough in the system's life to be a surprise sleeper hit on the console.

1983 1984 1985 1986

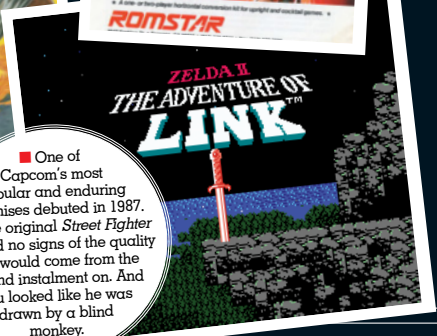
THE COMPLETE HI



■ When Nintendo's *Punch-Out!!* made its way from arcade to NES it received an endorsement and in-game appearance from Mike Tyson. When Nintendo's licence to use the boxer expired, the game was reissued with new character Mr Dream in Tyson's role.



■ One of Capcom's most popular and enduring franchises debuted in 1987. Yet the original *Street Fighter* showed no signs of the quality that would come from the second instalment on. And Ryu looked like he was drawn by a blind monkey.



■ ONE COMMON MISCONCEPTION about the 8-bit home videogame revival of the Eighties is that Nintendo swept the floor with its competition immediately, that Atari and Sega's efforts never stood a chance and came away more as historical footnotes than actual competition. And while that's mainly true, there's more to the story than that.

The 1986 holiday season was good to Sega and Atari, whose Master System and Atari 7800 consoles were hot ticket items that stores couldn't keep on the shelves... or at least, that's what the companies told reporters at the time. In just one short year, Nintendo went from claiming nearly 100 per cent of the videogame market at the beginning of the year to just 70, a percentage it held on to for the bulk of 1987.

The systems might have stood a chance and whittled away further at that share, if not for Nintendo's bullish tactics to keep good games off of its competitors' systems. In order for a company to make games for Nintendo's hot new system, at least in America, that company had to agree to not release that same game for another system for some time. And given that the NES had the most market share, that's where cash-hungry game-makers flocked.

The result was that by the time 1987 wrapped up, Nintendo had nearly twenty companies creating new games for the NES. Most of these were brought over from their native Japan, with companies like Capcom, Konami, Taito and Bandai setting up shop in the United States to distribute English-language versions of their

YEAR IN 19

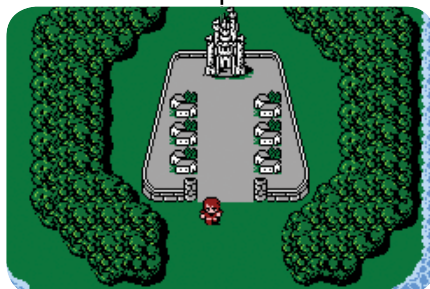
NOTABLE

LEISURE SUIT LARRY



■ OF COURSE, home consoles weren't the only things worth remembering in 1987. This was also the Golden Age of adventure games, and no adventure game stars shine more golden than our favourite lovable virgin loser, Larry Laffer, who embarked on an hilarious adventure to find love. And by love we of course refer to meaningless sex.

FINAL FANTASY



■ IF 1986's *Dragon Quest* was the game that created what we refer to as the Japanese-style RPG, it was 1987's *Final Fantasy* that cemented its permanence as a genre, proving that there was enough love in the collective hearts of gamers for more than one JRPG franchise. Famously, the game's development nearly killed Square, but instead ended up saving it.

AFTER BURNER



■ SEGA MIGHT have been creating a stir with its home consoles, but it was really at the arcade that the company shone brightest. This was truly Sega's finest hour: not only did 1987 see the debuts of *Super Hang-On*, *Shinobi* and *Alien Syndrome*, it also saw this brilliant pseudo-3D flight sim from company auteur Yu Suzuki.

STORY OF GAMES

1988 1989 1990 1991

games, but others – a toy company called LJN, a new start-up called Acclaim, and the old guard at Activision – were commissioning new games to specifically appeal to American kids.

Atari and Sega, by comparison, had zero licensees. And though both would see a handful of third-party titles over the next couple of years, it would never be enough to stop the runaway behemoth that was Nintendo.

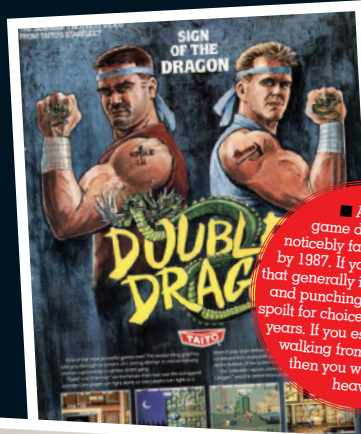
The biggest threat to the company that year was not in the United States, but in Japan. Electronics company NEC and noted game maker Hudson combined forces to create the PC Engine, known elsewhere as the regrettably named TurboGrafx-16. While architecturally similar to the NES, the PC Engine had twin 16-bit graphics chips that made Nintendo's graphics look archaic.

Not only that, but NEC was a huge name in Japan, both in electronics and in the gaming world. The popularity of its PC88 and PC-98 line of computers was the equivalent

in the country of the Spectrum and the Commodore 64 combined. The company that controlled computer gaming in Japan suddenly had a videogame console in stores just in time for Christmas, which Nintendo executives surely lost sleep over.

Finally, we would be remiss to not mention Commodore's Amiga 500 computer, which saw its debut in 1987. While it wasn't the first in the Amiga line, it was the most accessible, and is almost unarguably the de facto gaming computer of the late Eighties. With so many options, 1987 was a good time to be a gamer.

REVIEW 87



■ Arcade game design was noticeably falling into a rut by 1987. If you liked games that generally involved walking and punching then you were spoilt for choice for the next few years. If you especially loved walking from left to right then you were in hog heaven.

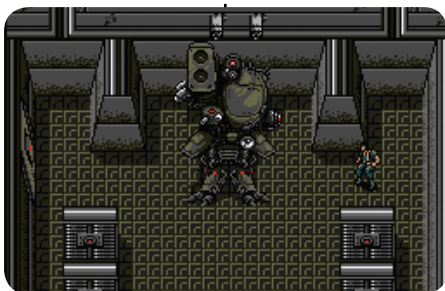


■ The PC Engine featured a wealth of brilliant 8-bit games but sadly never received an official release in the UK. The upside of this is that it spawned a dedicated import gaming movement that thrived for the best part of the next twenty years.



RELEASES

METAL GEAR



■ **SOLID SNAKE'S** very first published adventure took the controls and aesthetic of the best action games of its time and created an entirely new way of play that encouraged brains and sneakiness over brawn and bullets. The game also offered a plot that, while simple, had nuances and twists that didn't really exist in arcade-style games yet.

THE GREAT GIANA SISTERS



■ **YES, THE Great Giana Sisters** was at its heart a *Super Mario Bros.* rip-off, but what a rip-off it was! The team at Time Warp Games proved that the almighty computer was capable of making platform games just as fun as the consoles. The game is probably more remembered for being forced off the shelves once Nintendo got wind of it, though.

DEVELOPER —of the— YEAR

**Ron
Gilbert**

■ We owe a lot to *Maniac Mansion*, the graphical adventure game released in 1987 that was but the first in a long (though not long enough) line of heart-wrenchingly wonderful LucasArts adventure games. With this, his first game as creative lead, Ron Gilbert created a way of doing point-and-click right, set the stage for the offbeat humour the company would be known for, and created a scripting language called SCUMM so elegant in its simplicity that it could still be used today.

Most of us will of course think of Gilbert as the brains behind the later *Monkey Island* series, but it is in *Maniac Mansion* that we see the genesis of his brilliant and twisted career.



EXTENDED PLAY: 1987

PHANTASY STAR

Each month we select one of the most interesting or important games from our year in review... This month, we root for the underdog with Sega's *Phantasy Star*

■ CERTAINLY THERE WERE more notable games released in 1987 that could easily fill this space – *Final Fantasy*, *Street Fighter*, *Pirates!*... heck, even *Mega Man* debuted in 1987 – but few titles come close to attaining the elegance and artistic mastery that was Sega's *Phantasy Star*.

Released for the Master System two days after the original *Final Fantasy* in Japan, *Phantasy Star* was Sega's valiant attempt to create a story-driven RPG franchise of its own, following the immeasurable success of Enix's *Dragon Quest* the previous year. Like *Final Fantasy* and the other *Dragon Quest* homages of its time, *Phantasy Star* involved fighting turn-based battles, levelling up, and buying newer and more powerful equipment to fight even harder turn-based battles and repeat the process over again.

The formula is nothing new, but it is in the presentation that *Phantasy Star* shines. Rather than force the same old medieval fantasy clichés down people's throats,

the game put players in a world where a dense forest inhabited by wild creatures sat comfortably next to a bustling city that housed a spaceport taking passengers to faraway planets. Warriors could find themselves battling magical creatures with a battle axe one minute, and blasting robots with a laser rifle the next. Kingdoms were still ruled by kings who wore crowns and sat in thrones, though the royal guard more resembled Storm Troopers than knights.

Not only was the world unconventional, the story broke

the mould too. The hero of *Phantasy Star* was not a brave young man tasked with helping a king defend his kingdom for the sake of being a hero. No, this story was much more grounded. And in what is still sadly a rare occurrence in games, our hero was a young woman.

■ At the start of the game, Alis is the accidental witness to her older brother, Nero, being killed by soldiers representing a corrupt government official named Lassic for snooping around and learning too much. With his dying words, Nero hands Alis his sword and tells her that Lassic has gone mad and must be stopped, at any cost.

Though backstory in the game is somewhat limited, we get the feeling that Alis is not a particularly political woman.

IT IS IN THE PRESENTATION THAT PHANTASY STAR SHINES



■ *Phantasy Star*'s sci-fi-themed setting was a refreshing change for the RPG genre, and is still underused today.



■ Though Yuji Naka programmed *Phantasy Star*, its most important creator is Rieko Kodama, who still works at Sega and also worked on *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Skies Of Arcadia* and, more recently, *7th Dragon*.



■ *Phantasy Star's* first-person battles recalled *Dragon Quest* but looked much prettier than the Famicom game.




■ The first-person dungeon crawling of *Phantasy Star* was later revisited for Sega's *Shining In The Darkness*.

From what the game shows us, Alis doesn't set out to save the world. She's not here to be a hero. No, Alis sets out for vengeance. She means to kill the man who killed her brother, even if that man happens to be the most powerful person in the galaxy, and even if all she has is a cheap little sword she doesn't know how to use yet. And she does this without being an anime cliché or a pouty-lipped sexpot, making her a stronger female videogame character than most even aspire to be.

What follows is the greatest game on the Master System, and what might be the most memorable RPG of the 8-bit era. Alis and the strange companions she meets on her quest journey through unique environments that range from a mad scientist's lab to a cake



shop hidden in a monster-filled cave to a port town dealing in stolen contraband. The creatures they fight along the way are all gorgeously drawn in sprites that take up the majority of the screen and have bespoke animations. The dungeons they trek through are presented in a first-person perspective using a programming trick created by eventual *Sonic* co-creator Yuji Naka that still looks pretty good today.

The game is not perfect. It requires more tedious grinding than even many of its contemporaries, the dungeons are mostly repetitive, and the game has a nasty way of throwing you into the wilderness without much of a clue of what to do next. However, taken as a whole, it's a work of art worthy of study and reflection. 

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

■ **WE DON'T** know if it's out of some strange kind of respect or if the games just didn't perform well enough, but Sega has been remarkably subdued in not milking the *Phantasy Star* franchise. Yes, *Phantasy Star Online* spawned

more sequels and expansions than we care to remember, and indeed, the company had some often misguided spin-offs while the original series was still around, but there has been no attempt that we're aware of to continue the saga past

the original four games. We struggle to recall there even being rumours of a *Phantasy Star V* over the past eighteen years. The company seems hellbent on keeping the series contained just as it is, and there's really nothing wrong with that.



THE SEQUELS

PHANTASY STAR II (1989)



■ If *Phantasy Star* was a classic fairy tale, *Phantasy Star II* was a more matured Orwellian novel, forcing players to face uncomfortable situations and make some difficult choices. A classic in its own right.

PHANTASY STAR III (1990)



■ Though it is a fine 16-bit RPG on its own, with an interesting cross-generational story taking place over several years, this entry has so little to do with the series that the name seems slapped on for some crafty fan-based sales.

PHANTASY STAR ADVENTURE (1992)



■ Once Sega realised it had a hit on its hands, it experimented with spin-offs. This portable Game Gear entry combines classic Japanese adventure games with a light combat mechanic.

PHANTASY STAR IV (1993)

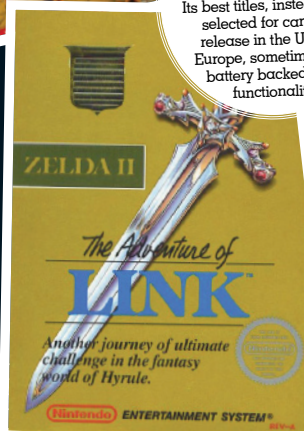
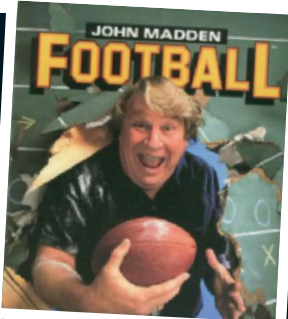


■ The name might have lived on past 1993's *Phantasy Star IV*, but this was truly the end of *Phantasy Star* as we knew it. And the game plays out like it knows it's over, tying up loose ends and revisiting our favourite moments.

PHANTASY STAR ONLINE (2000)



■ Originally released at the end of 2000, *Phantasy Star Online* was for many their first experience with an online RPG. Though it is fondly remembered and still played, its connection to the original games is slim.



■ After humble beginnings, Electronic Arts soon found mass appeal with its combination of high-quality computer titles and celebrity-endorsed sports sims. The latter would really come into their own in the following years as EA pledged faithful support to Sega's Mega Drive console.

■ While the Famicom Disk System continued to enjoy some support in Japan, the add-on never got an NES equivalent. Its best titles, instead, were selected for cartridge release in the US and Europe, sometimes with battery backed save functionality.

■ BEING AT THE top isn't easy. In the United States, where a newly revitalised home videogame market was booming, Nintendo was by far the dominant force at the beginning of 1988. As the numbers began to roll in after the ever-important holiday shopping spree, estimates put the company's share at about 70 per cent of the U.S. market, with the remaining 30 per cent split between Sega's Master System and Atari's 2600, 7800 and XE units. Clearly, Nintendo had a significant advantage by coming out first, having a higher marketing budget, and forcing its publishing partners to make games exclusively for its system. It had left its competition in the dust, but a new breed of contenders out of Japan with far more advanced graphics was a cause for concern.

NEC's PC Engine debuted in that region the year before, and was already well on its way to becoming the favoured console of its more sophisticated gamers. Though it had a relatively low-powered 8-bit processor like the NES, its graphics and sound capabilities were far superior, taking advantage of the fact that the innards of its competition were based on a design made over four years prior. Its claim to fame was faithfully reproducing the look and feel of games popular in the arcades, and its adaptations of popular titles of the time – such as *R-Type* and *Galaga '88* – proved this to be true.

An even more powerful console debuted in Japan in October. Sega's Mega Drive could play games that looked and sounded similar to the PC Engine's, but a 16-bit processor meant that it could run laps around its competition in terms of pure horsepower. It could calculate more complex data, move more objects on the screen, and run games faster

YEAR IN 19

NOTABLE

FORGOTTEN WORLDS



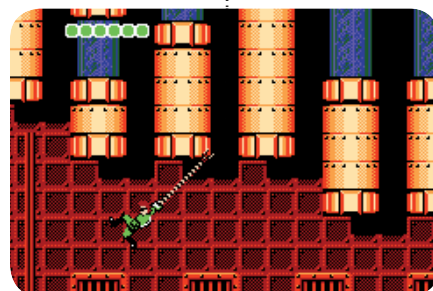
■ THIS CULT classic arcade game from Capcom is among its most manly. Players control one of two possible tough guys with machine guns and jetpacks who fly around destroying monsters and aliens while upgrading their equipment in bizarrely located shops. Unfortunately, a rotary dial on the cabinet means that home versions can never be the same.

SUPER MARIO BROS. 2



■ MOST PEOPLE with even a casual understanding of videogame history have heard the story of how *Super Mario Bros. 2* came about: as it's usually told, Nintendo of America wasn't happy with the sequel Japan got, so the company reworked another game of Miyamoto's – *Doki Doki Panic* – into a new Mario game exclusive to the West.

BIONIC COMMANDO



■ THE HOME version of *Bionic Commando* is a title that truly defines what made an NES game special. While the original arcade *Bionic Commando* was a relatively simple action-adventure, Capcom expanded the home version to include a bigger story, RPG elements, and exploration, creating a game uniquely suited to a home console.

STORY OF GAMES

1989 1990 1991 1992

than either the NES or PC Engine, making it what most consider the first true 16-bit home console.

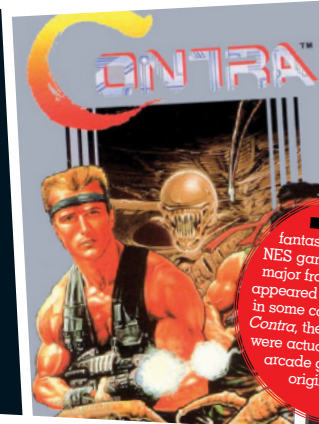
Analysts began wondering loudly when Nintendo would respond to these new threats. In Japan, rumours began circulating about its next-generation system, the Super Famicom (otherwise known as the Super Nintendo), but in the United States, the company had little reason to worry. Even as NEC and Sega prepared to strike with their own U.S. launches, Nintendo ramped up its marketing machine to new heights.

It converted over one million members of its free 'Fun Club' to Nintendo Power subscribers, sending out complimentary copies of the first issue of what was essentially a gigantic advertising pamphlet that almost instantly became the most-read periodical for young people. Nintendo was becoming more than a toy manufacturer; it was becoming the most popular brand for youngsters, so synonymous with children's entertainment that it was practically the next Disney.

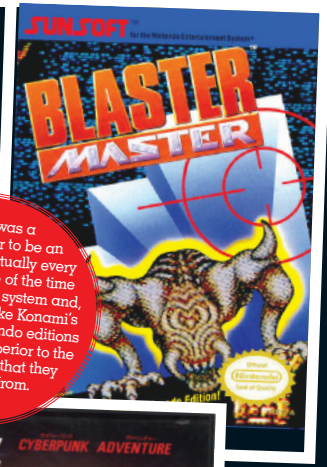
But even its own partners weren't entirely happy with the company. During the year, NES publisher Atari Games – tired of losing what it estimated as millions annually due to Nintendo controlling how many copies of its NES games were being manufactured – was the first software publisher to fight the giant. Atari engineers figured out how to bypass the security chip that kept other companies from making NES games, and at the end of 1988, Atari announced that it would begin manufacturing its own games without Nintendo's permission, filing a lawsuit that would be just the beginning of a long legal battle between the two companies.

REVIEW

88



■ 1988 was a fantastic year to be an NES gamer. Virtually every major franchise of the time appeared on the system and, in some cases, like Konami's *Contra*, the Nintendo editions were actually superior to the arcade games that they originated from.



■ Hideo Kojima's *Snatcher* remains one of the greatest Japanese adventures ever made and a sequel is still in high demand today. Though it debuted in 1988 in Japan, it would be another six years before an English version appeared.



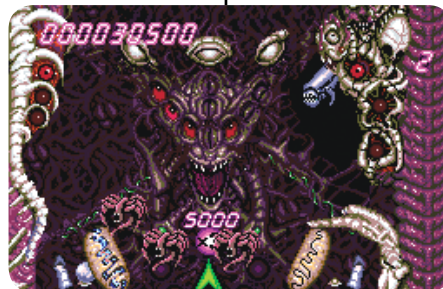
RELEASES

JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL



■ YOU'D BE hard pressed to find anyone who actually remembers the original *John Madden Football*, which was released for the Apple II this year, but we're all more than familiar with the name today. EA's financial gamble of paying sports celebrities to endorse their games paid off, and Madden's name still defines American football games to this day.

ALIEN CRUSH



■ NEC'S PC Engine was starting to find its place in Japan this year with unique titles that couldn't be replicated on the NES, and *Alien Crush* – a bizarre, fast-paced pinball game full of tons of gimmicks, hidden secrets and a soundtrack so intense it makes you want to run through a wall – was the kind of game early adopters could boast about.

DEVELOPER —of the— YEAR

Al Lowe

■ Al Lowe certainly wasn't the first game designer with a funnybone, but he is the first – and still one of the only – to make an entire career out of being a videogame comedian, following an earlier career that saw him work on projects such as *Winnie The Pooh In The Hundred Acre Wood* and *The Black Cauldron* for Disney.

1988 saw the second in Al Lowe's *Leisure Suit Larry* series. In many ways, it was the most dramatic departure for the character – the normally sex-driven loser cannot get laid in this game, with the exception of one scene that instantly kills him. But his globe-trotting quest proved that Larry wasn't a one-hit wonder, and paved the way for several more sequels.



EXTENDED PLAY: 1988

SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



Each month we select one of the most interesting or important games from our year in review... This month: we don a Tanooki suit and save the world

■ **SUPER MARIO BROS. 3** has to be the greatest sequel to anything, ever. Released in Japan on 23 October, 1988, the game was the result of two years of effort by creator Shigeru Miyamoto and frequent collaborator Takashi Tezuka to expand on all of the ideas that debuted in the original *Super Mario Bros.*

While *SMB3* obviously wasn't the first sequel, it was at the time the most ambitious. The original *Super Mario Bros. 2*, which was released only in Japan, played more like a difficult expansion pack for the original than a full-blown follow-up. And the *Super Mario Bros. 2* that Western gamers know – a series departure that sees Mario and his friends throwing vegetables around in a dream world – was actually a souped-up version of another Miyamoto and Tezuka collaboration, *Doki Doki Panic*.

With 3, the duo revisited the formula that made the original magic and cranked the volume up to 11. Mario (or

Luigi, in two-player mode) still travels through a series of levels, broken into segments, each of which ends when the player reaches the goal. However, this time around, he might suddenly find himself in a ghost house, or being chased by the sun through a scorched desert, or in a world where everything around him is four times its normal size.



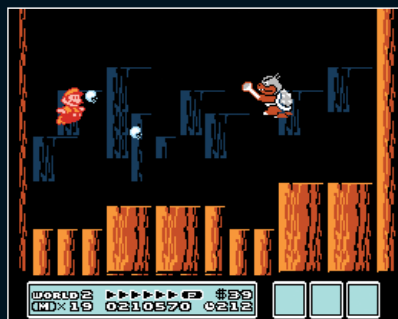
Floating blocks still held treasures inside, but in addition to the simple Fire Flowers and Super Mushrooms of the originals, our heroes might find themselves

donning frog suits, tossing hammers, or most impressive of all, strapping on a racoon tail that helped them fly.

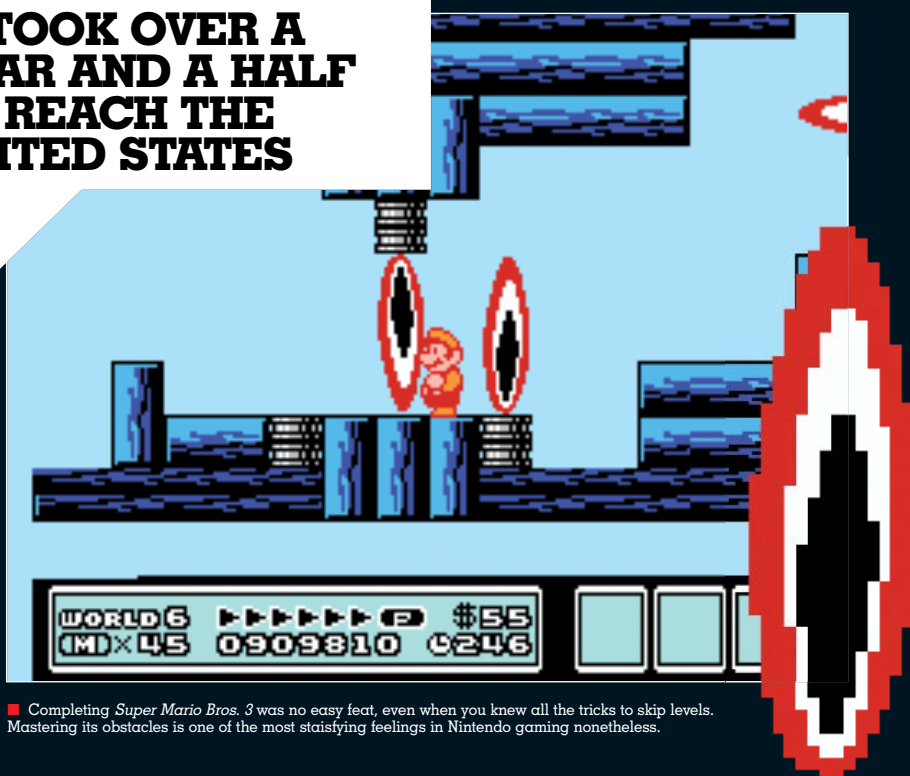
Castles were still guarded by ferocious monsters, but rather than repeat the same guardian several times, each castle had its own unique boss figure with unique powers and something resembling a personality.

■ ■ ■ The game was, of course, an instant hit in Japan, but it took over a year and a half to reach the United States, where Nintendo was busy promoting its version of *Super Mario Bros. 2*. Not only that, but

IT TOOK OVER A YEAR AND A HALF TO REACH THE UNITED STATES



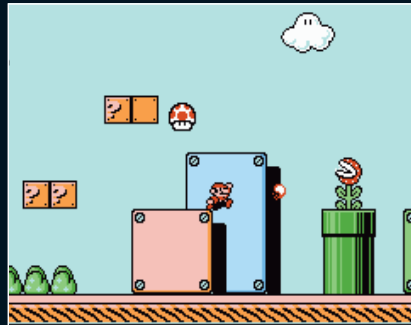
■ While *Super Mario Bros.* used multiple Bowser bosses, *SMB3* used his offspring, the Koopalings, instead.



■ Completing *Super Mario Bros. 3* was no easy feat, even when you knew all the tricks to skip levels. Mastering its obstacles is one of the most satisfying feelings in Nintendo gaming nonetheless.



■ The Toad houses, used to add diversion and bonus rewards, have since become a staple of the series.



■ By NES standards, *Super Mario Bros. 3* was once of the most colourful and attractive games of its time.

a manufacturing crisis saw it facing a ROM chip shortage, meaning that for the majority of the year Nintendo couldn't manufacture and keep enough copies of this game (and another newcomer, *Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link*) in stock.

The delay might not have been as severe if Nintendo had been able to sell *Mario 2* on schedule, but when left with a tough decision – cut its losses and spend premium chip costs to release *Mario 3* at a reduced profit before *2* had run its course, or cautiously hold back *3* while actively promoting *2* – the company chose the latter, plastering the game all over its commercials and its Nintendo Power magazine.

Fortunately, word that there was a *Super Mario Bros. 3* in Japan didn't spread too far beyond playground



talk and local rumour, even though it was true. Crafty video stores started importing copies and renting them out, and even Nintendo itself started slipping copies of the game into arcade cabinets to test the waters and, maybe, tease the hell out of fans, but for the most part kids were oblivious.

Most kids didn't see *Super Mario Bros. 3* until the end of 1989, when a lousy movie called *The Wizard* cashed in on Nintendo-mania and, through a licensing deal with the company, showed footage of the game to a country that for the most part didn't even know it was coming. The scene was exciting, the footage perfect, and it left the audience screaming for more, which Nintendo happily provided just four months later when the game finally debuted in stores.

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

■ TO SAY the game was a success is a massive understatement, as it has sold some 18 million copies to date. Adjusting for inflation, *Super Mario Bros. 3* generated somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$1.7 billion in sales for Nintendo – which at the time was the most of any videogame in history.

The original *Super Mario Bros.* may have laid the groundwork for the rest of the plumber's adventuring career,

but it was *Super Mario Bros. 3*'s themed worlds, sprawling levels and varied power-ups that solidified the template

its successors would follow. Even today, it's Nintendo's flagship licence, and its most enduring character.



THE SEQUELS

SUPER MARIO WORLD (1990)



■ There are some who feel that Mario's very next adventure – which expanded the ideas originated in *SMB3* into a sprawling 16-bit masterpiece – may be even better than *3*.

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. Wii (2009)



■ The basic concepts presented in *Super Mario Bros. 3* were turned into a delicious four-player adventure that encouraged teamwork as much as it did screwing over your friends.

SUPER MARIO 3D LAND (2011)

■ If *New Super Mario Bros.* was the ultimate modernisation of the *Super Mario Bros.* template, it's the 3DS' *Super Mario 3D Land* that brings the ideas introduced in *SMB3* to a brand new era, and a whole new dimension.



■ *Final Fight*, unleashed into arcades in December, was originally intended as a sequel to *Street Fighter*, but had its name changed after it switched from one-on-one to a scrolling beat-'em-up.



■ Many scoffed at its putrid green monochrome screen, but Nintendo's portable Game Boy was impossible to keep on store shelves at Christmas and sold 1 million units this year.

■ THERE WERE STILL some critics (most of them toy companies upset that kids were buying Nintendo instead of Barbie) predicting the doom-and-gloom end of videogames as 1989 began – calling them a “fad” and insisting that they would die off again just as they had in the great videogame crash of 1983 – but even the harshest critic couldn’t argue with the numbers.

The \$2.3 billion dollars in videogame sales in the United States in 1988 (most of it from Nintendo, of course) was certainly nothing to sneeze at, but the industry’s growth in 1989 proved once and for all that videogames were here to stay. That number jumped to a whopping \$3.4 million by the end of 1989, setting a new record for an industry that had peaked in 1982 at \$3.2 billion. And that’s with a ROM chip shortage that hindered the production of several hit games. Nintendo was not only ruling the videogame industry, it was ruling Japan, where it was the top-earning company in the entire country for the 8th year in a row.

But as 1989 progressed, the competition heated up as much more powerful consoles were introduced to American store shelves. Sega’s Mega Drive and NEC’s PC Engine were brought over, as the Genesis and the TurboGrafx-16, respectively. Each boasted far superior graphics and sounds that excited gamers, but with a harsh licensing program that prevented a Nintendo partner from putting its same games on other systems, both newcomers suffered from a weak software line-up. While the 400,000 Genesis and 300,000 TurboGrafx-16 systems sold in 1988 were respectable debuts, each had a long way to go if they had any hope in catching up with Nintendo, which had over 20 million NES systems in American homes at the end of 1989. One in every five American homes had a Nintendo hooked up.

YEAR IN 19

■ ■ ■ THOUGH THERE HAD been some mostly-forgotten efforts before, 1989 is the year that portable gaming as we know it was born. As the year began, Nintendo announced that it would introduce a portable videogame console called the Game Boy in Japan, promising an experience not dissimilar to its Family Computer (the Japanese name for the NES) on the go. The display was color-less monochrome, and early press materials put a lot of emphasis on the fact that Game Boy games featured scrolling backgrounds, something that may sound quaint now but was truly impressive to those used to the static LCD screens of portable games up to that point.

Atari, licking its wounds from Nintendo’s complete trouncing of its 7800 console (and following failed negotiations with Sega to bring out the Mega Drive as a 16-bit Atari system), quickly snatched up the rights to a colour portable system developed by a troubled software company called Epyx. When Nintendo unveiled the Game Boy in America at a trade show that summer, Atari was there to try and upstage it with

STORY OF GAMES

1990 1991 1992 1993

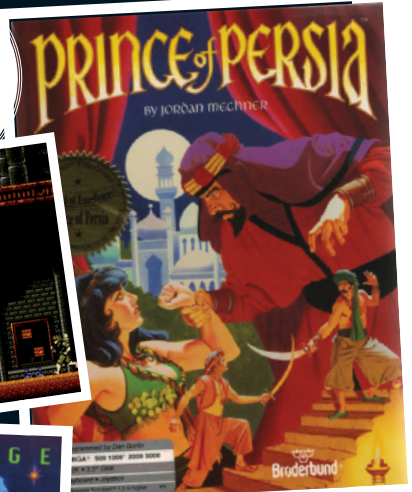
the Lynx, which unlike the Game Boy featured a backlit screen and full-color graphics. It also featured a price tag roughly double of what Nintendo was able to sell its system for. While Atari put up a good fight, it was never able to come near the Game Boy, which sold a million units in its five months on shelves in 1989 as toy stores struggled to keep it stocked during a mad Christmas rush.

MEANWHILE, AS CONSOLE manufacturers fought each other to bring easy, accessible games to the masses, computer gamers were enjoying the beginning of what would become the Golden Age of the much more sophisticated graphical adventures and RPGs. The mouse was gaining popularity as an input device for games, more and more computer owners ditched their old four-color CGA graphics cards in favour of 16-color EGA models (or for some, 256-color VGA), and CD-ROM support was just catching on, meaning games would soon be able to hold significantly more data than their magnetic disk counterparts (not to mention play CD-quality audio).

Sierra Online continued to produce follow-ups to its popular adventure game genres, releasing the third entries in both its *Space Quest* and *Leisure Suit Larry* franchises. LucasArts put out *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*, which pushed it one step further toward the first of its true masterpieces, *The Secret of Monkey Island*. Cinemaware, keeping true to its cinematic name, released the 1950s monster movie homage *It Came From The Desert*, and Accolade put out a German spy thriller called *The Third Courier*. While neither are particularly well regarded today, they served as prime examples of how the themes and subject matters in computer games were finding their own mature voice – one that Sega would mine in its war against Nintendo.

Finally, as if to bookend the videogame industry of the 1980s, December saw the theatrical release of *The Wizard*, a coming-of-age movie that ultimately served as little more than a Nintendo commercial, paving the way for a new decade in gaming that would be defined by brutal marketing wars.

Bat-mania swept the world this year thanks to the Tim Burton movie, and several video and computer games were released alongside it. Only the NES one really holds up.



Nintendo charged a lot to put its official blessing on an NES game, but companies like Color Dreams and Tengen discovered they could work around it.



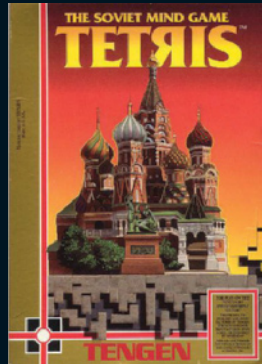
Mattel's Power Glove NES controller is the butt of videogame jokes today, but in 1989 the design, originally built for astronauts, was seen as high-tech.

DEVELOPER
—of the—
YEAR
Peter Molyneux

The often outspoken Peter Molyneux might be known today as a game designer who often overpromises on his work (he famously apologised publicly when

2004's *Fable* came out without many of the features he had talked about in interviews prior to its release), but in 1989 he was struggling to make ends meet with a company called Bullfrog that wouldn't have existed if it weren't for a mix-up that saw Commodore supplying the company with Amiga computers.

1989's *Populous*, co-designed by Molyneux, pioneered what we today call the 'god genre' and became the poster child for the open-ended experiences computer games provided.



EXTENDED PLAY: 1989

TETRIS

TENGEN VERSION

Each month we select one of the most interesting or important games from our year in review... This month, a tale of two Tetrises...



IN 1989, TWO nearly-identical games called *Tetris* were released for the Nintendo Entertainment System, just months apart. Both were, of course, based on the brilliant puzzle game developed by Alexey Pajitnov in Soviet Russia. Both featured the same basic mechanics, asking players to fill a row of seven tiles by managing seven different shapes as they fall from the top of the screen. While they certainly had their differences, they were for all intents and purposes the same game. So how did two different versions of *Tetris* end up on store shelves?

The answer is more complicated than we have room for but, in a nutshell, 1989 played host to a legal dispute that left both Nintendo and Atari Games subsidiary Tengen claiming to own the rights to sell console versions of the game. Tengen acquired the rights to the game back in 1988 through a third party, and had plans (and Nintendo

approval) to release the game on the NES. Early advertisements even show a Nintendo-approved version of the game.

However, as 1988 concluded, Tengen went rogue and started doing the unthinkable: manufacturing NES games without Nintendo's permission. *Tetris*, slated for May, would be its first new 'unlicensed' game.

THE RUSSIANS CLAIMED THEY HAD NOT SOLD CONSOLE RIGHTS TO ANYONE

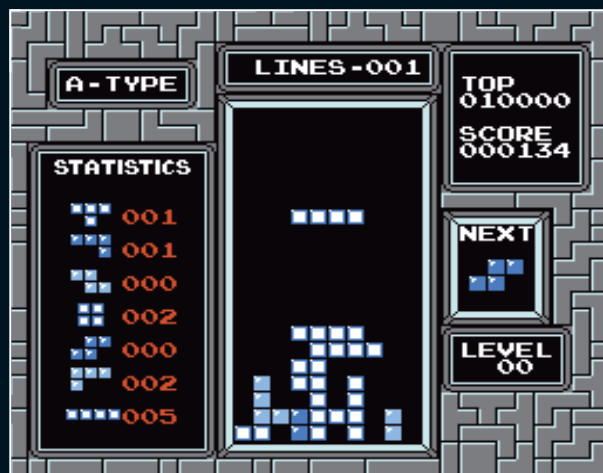
It was around this time that Nintendo, assuming that the handheld rights were still available, set out to negotiate with *Tetris*' owners (the Soviet government) to secure the game for its upcoming Game Boy. Upon arrival, the Russians claimed that they had not sold the home console rights to anyone! As the story

goes, the middleman who had secured what he thought were console rights and sold them to Tengen only had legal permission to sell the rights for versions on home computers, not consoles. Nintendo quickly snatched up these rights and informed Tengen.

Tengen, still believing it had legal clearance, sued Nintendo for copyright infringement and released the game anyway. Nintendo countersued, asking the judge to demand Tengen recall its version immediately. With a clearly superior case, the judge agreed without even taking the matter to trial. Tengen recalled over 200,000 copies of the game (which was even then a valuable collector's item, given its scarcity) and destroyed them all. Nintendo released its own version and sold 3 million copies, not to mention over 40 million more that would be packaged with its Game Boy. That Christmas, confused shoppers would search in vain for the clearly superior Tengen version, which would never be seen again outside of collector's circles.



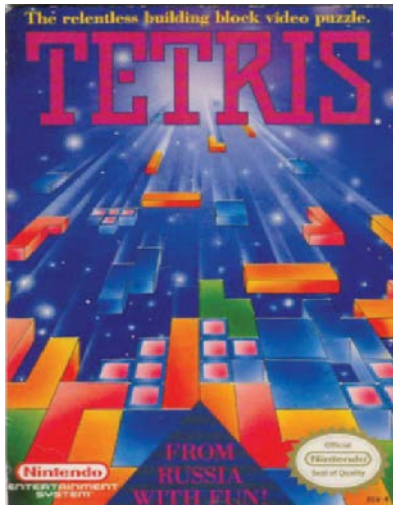
It's commonly believed that Tengen's *Tetris* is based on the Atari coin-up version, but the two versions were made in tandem.



Nintendo's version of *Tetris* is a fine game, but reviewers agree that Tengen's version was clearly superior.

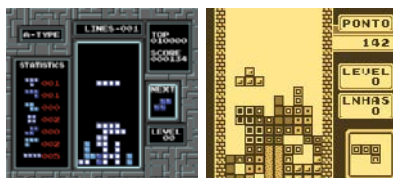
NOTABLE RELEASES

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?



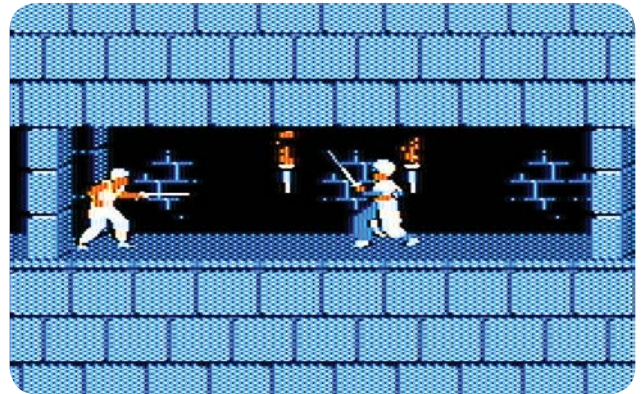
■ **TENGEN'S PARENT** Atari Games retained the arcade rights to *Tetris*, and continued marketing the game for some time. Nintendo went on to publish a handful of *Tetris* updates through the early to mid-Nineties for its various consoles, including the ill-fated Virtual Boy, while continuing to bleed Tengen dry in court over its unauthorised videogames. Tengen was forced out of business in 1993.

Some suspect that the Russians may have been double-dipping – intentionally selling the rights to *Tetris* twice and feigning ignorance when questioned – but it doesn't matter. The rights to *Tetris* – console, computer or otherwise – eventually found their way back to the game's creator, Alexey Pajitnov. He and longtime friend and collaborator Henk Rogers founded The Tetris Company, where Pajitnov oversees every *Tetris* game released while Rogers licences the rights to various companies. Former Nintendo of America president Minoru Arakawa even works at the Hawaiian office, like one big happy family reunion.



PRINCE OF PERSIA

■ **JORDAN MECHNER** followed up the brilliant *Karateka* with this fantastically cinematic action/adventure game with an Arabian Nights twist. As with all of his work, a rotoscoping technique involving filming an actor (in this case his brother) ensured fluid animation that still looks impressive to this day.



MOTHER



■ **MOST READERS** will be more familiar with *Mother 2* or, as it's known in the West, *EarthBound*, than they are with the original instalment. This game takes the stereotypes of Japanese-style RPGs (random encounters, grinding, dungeon crawling) and plops them in a 1950s-inspired suburban Utopia with a storyline and theme more emotionally resonant than its peers.

SIMCITY



■ **WILL WRIGHT'S** city management game came about quite by accident: while developing his previous title, arcade-style flight combat game *Raid On Bungeling Bay*, Wright realised he had more fun building his game than playing it. He tweaked his level editor into something others could use, boned up on city management theory, and created an accidental hit.

TMNT (ARCADE)



■ **NOTHING EMBODIES** the year 1989 more than the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, who were just on the verge of starring in a major motion picture. Konami's brilliant arcade game practically defined the four-player simultaneous beat-'em-up, and was a mainstay in arcades well past the shelf life of the turtles themselves.

HERO'S QUEST



■ **THIS GAME** is much better known by its later re-titling, *Quest For Glory* (it turned out *Hero's Quest* was too close to home to the board game *HeroQuest*). This brilliant fantasy-themed game from Sierra Online combines the best aspects of its adventure games such as *King's Quest* with RPG mechanics that make the player's avatar a little more personal.